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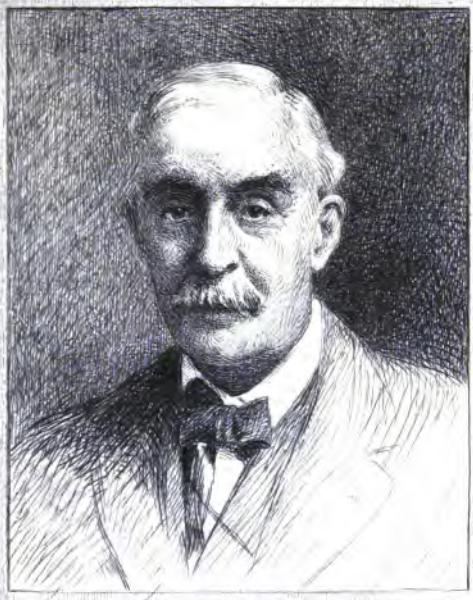

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What can be certainly known of God

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...can be certainly known of God ...d of Jesus of Nazareth?

AN INQUIRY

John Moore CAPES, M.A.

OF BALLIOL COLLEGE
OXFORD

LONDON

...HE AUTHOR AND SOLD BY J. BUMPUS, 158 OXFORD ST.
... BY THE AUTHOR, 8 BLANDFORD SQUARE, LONDON;
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1880

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2-28-39 J.A.

PREFACE.

MANY persons will, perhaps, take preliminary objections to my publishing this little book, on two grounds. Some will say that I ought not to have published it all; others that I ought not to have made it so short. The first class will pretend that in the present condition of religious belief, or non-belief, or dis-belief, it is not right to disturb people's minds still further by pointing out more clearly the erroneous nature of their misty opinions; and that we have reached an ideal condition of conservative piety, when most men go to church to please their wives, and most women go to please one another. To this theory there is the fatal objection that things in this state must necessarily go on from bad to worse, and that those persons whose opinions are disturbed by me have really no

definite opinions whatsoever. If the Evangelical, the High Church, and the Broad Church clergy are to continue, as now, to teach their flocks the noble art of cheating the Law Courts, the Thirty-nine Articles, Prayer Book, and the Ordination services, to the utmost possible extent of *double entendre*, what, I may ask, will be the practical religiousness of the English people fifty years hence? If what I here say is philosophically and theologically true, I venture to assert that no time can possibly be more appropriate for out-spokenness than the present.

Others will object to my treating such subjects at so brief a length. I ought to have written, they think, at the very least, a large volume, or more. My reply is this: that in such subjects as these little more is needed than to state questions and difficulties clearly and accurately, to teach readers to know what they themselves mean and what I mean; and the work is all but done. It is enough, for instance, to say simply that according to a certain creed a man and a woman were once made

out of nothing, and commanded by God not to eat a particular fruit; and that a talking snake came and told them that this was a lie, and that they then ate one of the fruits. It is added that in the afternoon God walked in the garden, and told them that they and their children would be damned in eternal fire for this act; and that in consequence all the babies that are born are damned all over the world to this day unless they are baptised. If a man can, as many do, believe this to be a true account of God's ways, then it is useless for me to say any more.

Take another subject. Is not a mere existence different from actual living? And does God live a real life, or does He merely exist like a stone? This is the great question of my book; but if a reader does not understand the difference between existence, as a stone, and life, like that of a man, when it is clearly stated to him, I might write volumes and he would be none the wiser.

Once more. Is God the absolute master of the world, or is He not? It is simply yes or no.

If I wrote on till to-morrow, what would my reader be the wiser, if he cannot say at once either yes or no? I am bold enough, therefore, to think that my book is none the worse, but all the better, for being so short, especially as if it were long, very few persons would read it. Moreover, I could not write with profit what I have written, except concisely. I have devoted nearly half a century to these subjects; and for myself I do not see such truths as that 'out of nothing nothing can come' one whit more clearly than I did before I went to Oxford as an undergraduate. If another person does not see this with me, and also the equally manifest truth that something cannot become nothing, we may as well leave off discussing all religious subjects at once. If he does not agree with me, by merely directing his understanding to comprehend what is meant by something and what by nothing, we may as well change the subject and say no more. Only I will hope that the old Latin censure is not applicable to me, *Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio.*

Once more; it will be asserted that it is unjustifiable in me, as a clergyman of the Church of England, to publish such statements, considering that I subscribe to 'the doctrine' of the Church, in all things, in the Prayer Book and the offices for ordination and consecration. Yet, how can I be blamed, while it is the fact that every Anglican child is taught in the Catechism to say that every baby that dies before it is baptised, is damned as the victim of God's wrath, because Adam and Eve were persuaded by a talking snake to eat a fruit which God had forbidden? Every clergyman also says the same, whenever he baptises an infant. Am I to be blamed in such a state of things as this?

So, again, in the Ordination Service the bishop tells every man whom he makes a 'priest' to receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of his hands, by which act he will for the future be able to forgive men's sins and to refuse to forgive them.

Now, of those who are thus made 'priests,' how many believe that these words are not a glaring

untruth? Surely, the scandal is, not that I should write this book, but that such a state of things should exist for a single hour in the midst of us.

As to the general accusation, that I write in a spirit of destructiveness, I deny the charge without reserve or hesitation. I have called attention to the undeniable facts of the time, and to the canker which is eating into the heart of the practical religion of England. And I have done far more than this. I have written in the strictest spirit of reconstructiveness, and I have shown to the many aching, doubting hearts, which are crying out for some clear knowledge of God and hope for futurity, that while the superstitions of the past are vanishing away, there does remain a distinct and real knowledge of God, to sustain us here, and that our certainty of a future life is far more real and rational than has hitherto been believed to be possible.

I have one further reason for publishing the strictures on the services of the Church of England which occasionally occur in these pages. I possess

no benefice, and therefore am afraid of no society or 'aggrieved parishioners' moving the Law Courts to deprive me of my income. It is too much to expect a poor clergyman who in his mind suffers bitterly from the evils which I denounce, to bring his wife and children to poverty in his zeal to reform abuses by which his own conscience is grieved, but for which they care nothing. I write, then, on behalf of those who long for a spokesman, and cannot find one. Moreover, it is now forty-six years since the 'Tracts for the Times' first started, with the aim of magnifying the priestly powers which the Protestant English clergy were supposed to possess, but which they so strangely undervalued. 'If the trumpet give an uncertain sound,' they said, 'who shall prepare himself for the battle?' They blew, and with no uncertain sound, for it afterwards proved to be the call to Rome, followed by the voices of many sirens who whisper that there is no God, or that it is useless to seek after Him. May I not, before I die, take up another trumpet, and blow another melody, weak in

power, but far more clear and sweet, which shall call, not to the priesthood and the Pope, but to the One Father of us all, and to Jesus of Nazareth, whom He has sent?

J. M. C.

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PRELUDE.

FAR off amid the cloud-wrapt years gone by,
Each passing age unrolls its little span,
And ever, in the silent ceaseless change,
Weeps, toils, and suffers still our brother man.

And still, in every age and every clime
New Laws and Prophecies rise up, and claim
The abject homage of his trembling soul,
And bid him worship in the Eternal Name.

O cruel mockery of men's hopes and fears!
One voice alone can still his restless cries;
The Law of Life that Jesus dying taught,
The Law of Love, the Law of Sacrifice.

WHAT CAN BE REALLY KNOWN OF GOD AND OF JESUS OF NAZARETH?

CHAPTER I.

Personal reasons for writing this book.—We know more of the subject than was known one hundred years ago.—Accuracy in thought, and language, the first essential to our undertaking.—The worthlessness of popular religious phraseology.

1. Is it possible to answer this question so as to give any satisfaction to those persons to whom the religious interpretation of human life is a necessity, and who at the same time repudiate every species of guesswork as the foundation of religious belief? By the word satisfaction I do not mean the mere solution of a curious historical problem, but a solution which in some degree may help towards the thorough understanding of the relation of the Unseen God with ourselves. Is there any rational sense in which the personal history of Jesus of Nazareth may cast some rays

of light on that awful mystery, the history of humanity? Setting aside every species of superstition, and applying the strictest historical and philosophical tests to the records of His life and death, does any *residuum* remain which can satisfy the mind, that loves truth above all things, and yet would gladly discern, in the personality of Jesus, some aid to the understanding of Him to Whom we cannot rationally apply the word 'person' at all?

What I have to say to my fellow-sufferers in ignorance and trouble, now that my own life is drawing to its close, may not be worth much. Perhaps it is worth nothing. Nevertheless, few men have passed so many years in the habitual contemplation of all the difficulties involved in any attempt at answering the question before us. Without exaggeration I may say that, for nearly half a century, I have never practically ceased to inquire into, and think upon, the critical, philosophical, and moral difficulties, which so many others feel as keenly as I do; and it is, therefore, I hope without presumption, that I now bring together, as briefly as possible, the results of the thoughts of a whole life, trusting that here and there some mind, unknown to myself, may be glad to hear what little I have to say. There must be thousands,

and tens of thousands, who in secret are rebelling against the tyranny of ignorance and superstition which weighs them down, or at least, which silences them without satisfying them. Profound as is the interest they feel in the whole subject of religion, and clear as is their conviction, that the one work before them is to ascertain what is true, they are yet too busy with the affairs of life, or are yet too young, or ill-informed, to be able to know what is really to be known. Such persons are always glad to hear what is to be said by others who understand their difficulties, and have given year after year to honest inquiry. It is for such persons that I write, and not for those who are prepared to be 'shocked' at statements with which they are not familiar; nor, on the other hand, for those who are satisfied with those fictions, which pass for theological and philosophical reasoning in the religious world. I have nothing to offer to those who, in matters of religion, desire a large quantity of half-proved theorising, rather than a few truths which are certain; nor, again, have I written for that multitude which dislikes taking much trouble in the search for religious truth—who are prepared to devote more research to the study of a new dress, than to an inquiry as to their relationship to the God Whom they pre-

tend to worship at considerable length on Sundays.

2. Innumerable persons, in their hearts, look upon such subjects of inquiry as needless, and if needless, then, as also tiresome and uninteresting. To such people, I say, by all means if you find the subject uninteresting, do not take any trouble about the matter, so far as this book is concerned. I have not written these pages for your instruction or entertainment. You must go elsewhere, if you want religious reading, as I am writing only for those who not only care for the subject, but care for it very much indeed. Whether I am right, or whether I am wrong, the subjects I treat, and the manner in which I treat them, require a steady resolution, and a recurrence, again and again, to the subject on the part of those who are not familiar with it, nor with the methods of reasoning here employed. It is impossible to make the subject an easy one; but if I make good what I attempt, the sad and anxious soul will find herself consoled and supported, and prepared to die, far more than by all the trifling talking and writing about religion which serves as a poor sort of narcotic to hundreds of thousands of men, and still more of women to-day.

3. Every age, moreover, that goes by, places us in a better position for such inquiries than was within the reach of ages past. It is not only that scientific, historical, and critical knowledge makes positive advances, or that independence of thought is more frequently found in connection with a strong sense of religious obligation, than was the case in past times. Philosophy, which is the foundation of all our religious knowledge, is still very far indeed from having ascertained her own limits, or learnt all that is involved in the truths she perceives. It is not true to say that on the great metaphysical questions we know no more than did the Greek or Indian philosophers. It is not true, that we can be sure that we ourselves understand what those Greeks and Indians meant by the terms they employed. It is not true that we understand everything that the great mediæval philosophers meant by their half-Aristotelian phraseology, or how far they made any distinct and valuable additions to our knowledge of our own nature, and of our conceptions of that unseen life of the Universe, which, because we cannot comprehend it, we call Infinite, or Omnipotent, or an Eternal Mystery. For some three or four thousand years, men with faculties like our own, have been thinking on the same problems. Such names as those of Socrates, Plato,

and Aristotle among the ancients; and those of Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel among the moderns, will occur to every one as some of the great thinkers who have led the way towards our present knowledge. But who can say that he has thoroughly realised what was the meaning which these masters attached to their distinctive terminologies? Who can tell that they themselves knew only what they seem to us to mean, or that they were not frequently conscious of a certain imperfection and incorrectness in the language they employed?

4. Surely as the ages unroll themselves, and the thinkers of each age think on and on, in patient humility, learning both the powers and the limits of the great god-like gift of reason, humanity, though with trembling steps and many stumblings, does move onwards to a clearer knowledge of the acts of the Invisible, and of itself, and of its destiny. Something more has been really learnt than the phenomena of sound, or of electricity. We may have come to know with certainty that some things *must* be true, beyond the talk either of the worshippers of molecular action, or of theological phrases, which are destitute of all meaning whatsoever. What we have really learnt may be little in amount, but it is nevertheless real; and we may at last be

able to escape, from the dominion of words, into a region where thought is no longer the bond slave of phrases, which are as worthless as the old legend of the phœnix or the mermaid.

5. In this latter end of the nineteenth century, then, I propose to inquire how far, by the aid of the philosophies and the criticisms to which we have attained, it is possible to come to any satisfactory conclusion as to the personality of Jesus of Nazareth; his life, his teaching, his character, and his relationship, as an actually existing being, with the Eternal Source of all existence.

And here, at the outset of our inquiries, we are met by the preliminary question, can we, without self-deception, form any distinct conception whatever as to the nature of God Himself? The determination of this question, I would earnestly beg my readers to reflect, is absolutely essential to our forming any such idea as to what Jesus was, as may justify us in drawing up some sort of definition concerning His nature. If we can form no such idea, we cannot satisfy the aspirations of our souls by adopting the popular word 'mystery,' and other kindred devices for enabling our reason to commit suicide, and for reducing human speech to the level of the

inarticulate voice of the brutes. If we are satisfied that all things concerning God are a 'mystery' which cannot be in any sense understood, there is only one lawful course open to us, and that is, to keep silence concerning them.

6. We cannot put into words that which we do not, in some sort, understand. Language is the expression of ideas; it is the instrument by which we convey to others those conceptions of things, which we have in our own minds. If we have no conceptions at all of these things, such as they really are, there is no possibility of our describing or defining them in human language. We have nothing to describe or define. We have no ideas to communicate. We metamorphose ourselves into parrots, and repeat empty sounds. To call such repetitions the reverent utterance of 'mysteries' beyond human comprehension, is nonsense. Such a proceeding is not reverent: it is rather an insult towards the Almighty God. God is not honoured by the vain chatterings of our foolish lips: it is not an act of humility to take a sentence, or a term, which conveys no definite idea, and to fancy that we dignify it by calling it a revelation from God. Is the Almighty a conjuror, who teaches us to say our lesson of nonsense, and

would have us be satisfied that we are thus learning the truths which are hidden in his own Eternal Being?

7. This, indeed, is a caution which cannot be too strongly insisted upon, if we are to make any real progress in our theological knowledge. It is simply an act of self-deception, to employ words, to which we are unable to attach a definite signification, and to imagine that it is lawful to use such words as the expression of our belief in some truth, which is mysterious or revealed by God to man. The extent to which this self-deception is practised would be incredible, did we not see it everywhere around us, and in every Church and denomination which calls itself Christian. On every side we meet with sincere and intelligent men and women, who are content to adopt this practice, and honestly imagine that they are thus reverently and humbly employing their reason in accordance with that which they speak of as the 'will' of God. It is only indeed in religious matters that they play tricks with their faculties. They never fancy that they are expressing their belief in other historical subjects, or in the truths of science or philosophy, by the adoption of phrases which, in their own minds, have either no significance at all, or else are

so vague and cloudy that they cannot be regarded as really differing from the inarticulate mutterings of the lower animals in the scale of creation. On every occasion when they desire to communicate their thoughts to their friends, or to proclaim their convictions aloud to the world, their first care is to clear their own minds of empty, though high-sounding sentences, and to make sure that they themselves know what are the ideas they wish to communicate, and not merely what are the precise syllables which they wish to proceed from their lips.

8. But not so in religion. The term 'mystery' has been perverted to a use which is fatal to the acquisition of a correct knowledge of the relationship between God and man, so far as it can be comprehended, and of those past historical facts, which are supposed to be the chief medium for the acquisition of such knowledge. I do not exaggerate when I say that nearly all religiously minded persons live in this state of habitual self-delusion. They are the victims of a notion that realities, which are utterly beyond man's capacity for comprehension, can be justly, though inadequately, defined in terms which are simply the product of man's personal experience. That such

a notion is nothing less than preposterous, is evident to them the moment they apply it to matters of ordinary life. What would be said to any man, who should bid a lisping infant draw up a synopsis of Euclid's Geometry, when his intelligence and physical achievements had gone no further than to the sucking of a coral, or crawling upon the floor? It would be, not only that the child was unable to master the laws of a geometrical relationship, but that his reason could attach no meaning to the elementary terms of geometry. And yet, the nearly universal practice of the so-called Christian world, is every whit as presumptuous, as would be the audacity of the man who should ask us to accept the lisping of infancy, when it was just beginning to recognise the difference between one toy and another, as a proof of its comprehension of the most abstruse problems of mathematical analysis.

CHAPTER II.

Necessity for distinguishing between words and ideas.—How far it is possible to use human language in speaking of things concerning God.—Correctness of knowledge necessary in matters where the emotions are excited.—Knowledge of God in His Essence impossible.—Necessity of preliminary definitions of meanings of words.—Mischief of employing words without distinct meanings in religious subjects.—How far it is true to say that there is only one God.—Absurdity of belief in the existence of a devil from all eternity.—All things, both good and evil, are by the will of God.

9. THIS, then, is the first request I have to make of my readers, viz., that they would clearly and resolutely recognise the distinction between words and ideas. I say 'resolutely' as well as 'clearly,' because society is permeated through and through with a love for confounding the two things, and people do not like to be asked to think whether they know exactly what it is that they mean, by what they say. It hurts their pride to have it insinuated that they do not know what it is that they are talking about. And, moreover, it is troublesome to most people to clear their minds of the confused and hazy ghosts of ideas, amidst

which they are themselves contented to dwell. It is a laborious and disagreeable process, this 'clearing of the mind of cant,' as Dr. Johnson said, with all the characteristic force of his daily talk. And it is especially laborious and disagreeable to the half-educated classes, however high their social position, who fill our churches and read religious books. Life according to their tastes can be got through very well without troubling one's self about this wearisome accuracy of speech. If every one were forced to use no words to which they could attach no precise meaning, all the pleasure of life would be destroyed.

10. Surrounded by such influences, any man, and still more any woman, who should beg to be shown the meaning of the theological phrases which he, or she, is desired to accept, is called upon for no little resolution and courage in following the dictates of conscience and enlightened reason. It is supposed to be an impertinence in any man who is not satisfied with what satisfied his father, or his grandfather before him. Nevertheless, I cannot too urgently press upon every one who desires to be one of those of whom it is written, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,' that their first duty is to distinguish between words and

ideas. No mind which has not shaken itself free from the fetters which still hold mankind in general in bondage, can hope to enjoy the 'glorious liberty of the children of God.' Undoubtedly, it is possible to pervert this liberty into licence, and to refuse acquiescence in philosophical or theological statements, solely to save one's self the trouble of inquiry, just as the multitude acquiesces in unmeaning phrases, from their indolence and a desire not to be troubled. There is a species of 'nescience' now in fashion, which is as irrational as the most narrow-minded of superstitious bigotry, and which springs from very nearly the same source: that is, idleness and indifference to truth as such. One is just as fatal as the other. Neither of them seeks what is true, and only what is true. Both care only for present ease and comfort, and they are neither of them justified in considering themselves to be lovers of truth, wherever it is to be found. They say the whole subject is inexplicable, and it is a misuse of reason to meddle with matters which cannot be brought to the test of experiment. The whole subject is profound and mysterious, says the other, and it is a misuse of reason to pretend to set up our own judgment, in examining into truths which are beyond the reach of reason.

11. Here let me guard myself against a possible misconception. Those who will not take the trouble to understand me may perhaps wish to stop me at once, by alleging that I am asserting that no words can be used by man to express any knowledge whatsoever of the Eternally Unknown; yet this is the reverse of what I am urging. What I do urge upon the humble and resolute religious mind is simply the repudiation of the popular practice of adopting statements concerning God to which it is impossible that our intellect can attach any real significance. Creeds and religious services abound with such terms in Rome, Greece, and England alike. Common talk on non-theological questions abounds with such terms. We differ from one another on a thousand matters, for the sole reason that we habitually indulge ourselves in the employment of words from which all meaning is necessarily divorced. Few people, except the thoroughly cultivated—and how few are they!—are careful always to say nothing which is not more or less destitute of meaning, and foolish. It is not that they are non-prosaic, and that they love a jest. Far from it. Muddle-headedness, as a rule, is not found in company with a capacity for wit and humour. On the contrary, wit and humour, and especially wit, requires that very clearness of thought and accuracy

of speech for which I earnestly plead in matters of religion and philosophy. So it is, in the case of the vulgar notion that the essence of poetry consists in its being opposed to rigorous truth, and that mathematical genius is alien to an artistic and musical gift. That satisfaction with the vague and indefinite in speech which is a characteristic of the ordinary 'Christian' is not peculiar to him or to her. The same self-deception is practised in all those spheres of mental activity in which the emotions are powerfully excited. Accuracy as to fact and definiteness of language are held to be needless where the feelings are to be deeply touched. Yet how false is the idea! What is a poem worth which involves conceptions of human nature which are not rigorously true? What is a picture or statue worth which represents natural beauty, or men and women, as different from that which the most exact observation has discovered them to be? What are the rules of musical composition but a result of scientific observation of atmospheric laws, and of a study of the modes in which the mind is affected by various combinations of sound? In every case, science must first come in and learn what are the actual facts of the visible and mental universe, and then art enters, and employs this scientific knowledge in the imagining and executing of new and bound-

less combinations, under the guidance of that perception of the beautiful, after which the human soul struggles, conscious that its attainment is essential to the complete employment of the faculties with which it is gifted.

12. Recognising, then, this fundamental duty of saying no more concerning God than we can think concerning Him, we proceed to inquire what we *can* thus think. There is a well-known passage in 'Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity' which, little as it was acted upon by Hooker himself, is so exquisitely beautiful and true, that I quote it as it stands. There are, perhaps, no other prose sentences in our language which more irresistibly show to what perfection of eloquence the English tongue can attain. 'Dangerous,' it begins, 'dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know be life, and joy to make mention of His name; yet our soundest knowledge is, to know that we know Him not as indeed He is, neither can know Him: and our safest eloquence concerning Him, is our silence, when we confess without confession, that His glory is inexplicable, His greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon

earth; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few.'[1]

13. Here, in the rise and fall of these melodious cadences, Hooker has simply stated the fundamental fact that we can have no knowledge of God as He is, and that therefore our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence. And this it is that I ask all the disputants of to-day to learn and to take to heart; viz., that we cannot think anything concerning God as He is in Himself, and therefore are bound to say nothing which pretends to define His nature. Nor can we make the smallest advance towards a knowledge of the nature of Jesus of Nazareth, even when we have cleared away the mists which surround His visible human personality, until we have ascertained how far we are capable of attaining to any such distinct conception concerning God as can be embodied in human language, and thus conveyed from one man to another. If we cannot think anything definite of God Himself, it is manifestly impossible that we should think anything definite concerning the essential union between Jesus and God, of such a kind as to supply us with any trustworthy knowledge of the relations

[1] *Eccles. Polity*, Book I. § 2.

in which we ourselves stand towards God, and what is His will concerning us now and hereafter.

14. First of all, and above all then, we must recognise and acquiesce in the simple fact that any knowledge of God, as He is in Himself, is now and must always be impossible. And, surely, this fact is so simple that every honest thinker can see that it is as I have said. Can we even form any conception of the operations of any mind which is greater in essence than our own? Can a person to whom love is an impossible feeling understand what it is to love? He can repeat the words of others concerning love, but to him they are empty beatings of the air. He does not know *what it is* to love. It is, indeed, almost, if not quite impossible, to understand those varieties of the passion of love of which we ourselves have had no personal experience. I do not believe that it is possible for one who is not a father or mother to comprehend the nature of parental love. Just so it is probably impossible for the young to comprehend the changeableness of human affection. To them, the two well-known French sayings seem a shallow calumny. 'In life,' say these *maximes*, 'it is always one who loves, and the other who suffers himself or herself to be loved;' 'It is one who gives the kiss,

and the other who offers the cheek.' To the young mind, from its ignorance and want of experience, these bitterly true sayings are almost revolting from their apparent harshness.

15. Or, again, what is mathematical truth to many intellects? An incomprehensible multitude of technicalities, conveying no idea to the understanding. Being without the mathematical faculty themselves, they are wholly unable to follow the mathematician through the mental processes by which he evolves one truth from another. Their own reason is so far defective that the operations of a more perfect intelligence are incomprehensible to them. The terms in use in the statements of an algebraic, or geometric, or trigonometric formula, are as wholly without meaning to them as they are to a horse or a dog. In the fine arts, again, the influence which beauty of form and colour exercises upon minds endowed with the faculty of perceiving and feeling beauty, is incomprehensible to those who are not thus endowed. Being apt to limit the whole range of poetic achievement by the horizon of their own imperfect minds, such persons are given to despise these æsthetic sensibilities, and to set them down as a sort of womanish weakness which may be pardoned in a woman, because she is

a woman, but in a man are a token of a certain effeminacy, and unfitness for the more heroic virtues to be expected from the stronger sex. They do not understand the mental processes by which beauty is perceived and felt. The terms by which these processes are described by those more gifted than themselves seem nonsensical or bombastic. They can understand that sensuous sensitiveness to the face of a handsome woman which is universal in mankind; but when a man tells them how he is affected by the curves in an antique vase, or how the blood in his veins begins to course with a warmer glow at the sight of a figure in a picture, they turn upon the heel, and walk away from the companionship of one whom they regard as afflicted with something like incipient idiocy.

16. In music again, the capacity which many people of both sexes possess for being interested, touched, and excited by performances of different kinds, is completely beyond the comprehension of those who are not thus endowed by nature. A few simple chords are played, or a few notes of a melody are sung, and the non-musical observer sees that the whole minds of some persons undergo an instant transformation. It seems as if an invisible power were enthralling them with some species of enchant-

ment, leading their imagination into some distant, happy region, where thought and feeling rejoice in a perfect freedom and intensity, unknown to those who are not thus moved. If the observer is a man of large and enlightened mind, he is disposed to envy those to whom nature has granted a gift, which she has withheld from himself. If he is more narrow and ignorant, as well as unsympathetic, he sets down this sensibility as a species of infirmity, incompatible with great power of intellect and a self-controlling energy of character. At the best, he does not understand the mental operation by which those who are musically sensitive and cultured, thus think and feel. He cannot define or describe them by any words which can convey to others any definite ideas of his own mind.

17. How then can man's finite reason form any distinct and accurate conception of the essential nature of a Being, to whom he applies the word Infinite, but of whose mode of accomplishing his Will, we cannot form the faintest idea? Surely the very attempt is absurd, and shows how entirely ignorant we are of our own powers and of the nature of all the operations of our own minds, and of mind as such. Were it not that the employment of metaphor is one of the most fruitful sources

of self-deception, and of mutual deception, I would say that for a man to attempt to comprehend God in Himself, is as futile as an attempt to hold the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand.

It is equivalent to the assertion that the little is as large as the great, or that all the ages that have passed since the world began are equal in duration to a single moment of time. Until we have mastered this fundamental truth that the infinite *cannot* in any possible way be comprehended by the finite, it is useless to attempt to proceed further in our present inquiry.

18. Nor is this fundamental truth really denied by the serious and honest thinkers, who belong to any philosophical school, or any religious community. The interminable wranglings, excommunications, and persecutions, which constitute a large portion of what, for some reason or other, we call religious history, is really the record of the superficial or selfish devices by which this truth has been hidden from the eyes of the non-thinking multitude, when the honest and the profound seem to differ so widely from one another as actually to contradict one another on this question of the finite and the infinite. This is frequently because they are viewing the details of a most complex mental con-

ception from different points of view. If they could strip their phraseology clear of all extraneous growths, and be assured, as geometricians are, that they used the same words in the same senses, they would frequently be found to be as completely in agreement as the students of geometry or astronomy. It is often only for want of a preliminary explanation of the exact meaning, and full extent of the terms they employ, that the differences of their opinion seem so irreconcilable. At any rate, if any of my readers does really imagine that it is possible for the human intellect to form, within itself, any such conception of the substantial nature of God, and of the mode in which He acts in harmony with that nature, as can be described in human language, I would ask him to close this book at once. He and I have no common ground to go upon. I believe him to be the victim of an illusion, and the slave of mere sounds and beatings of the air, and of the letters which he or others have put together upon paper, and made into words. I have nothing more in common with him than I have with a person who should deny the truth that '*ex nihilo nihil fit.*' I see that he does not know the difference between something and nothing, between being and not being, between the operations of the mind and the sound of the voice.

19. Here again let us remember that the subject of our inquiry is twofold. We have to determine not only whether the human mind can form any conception of the actual nature of God, as He is in Himself, but also, whether we can comprehend the mode in which His nature acts, in causing the universe to be what it is, including His mode of acting in regard to ourselves individually. To take an illustration from our modes of thinking concerning material objects—we can form definite conceptions through our senses, as to the essential natures of blueness, and yellowness; or, to speak more correctly, of the essential visible difference between a blue object, and a yellow object. We also perceive that, by mixing a blue liquid with a yellow liquid, we produce a green liquid. All this we perceive to be certainly the fact in reference to the inherent natures of blue, yellow, and green. But this perception tells us nothing of the chemical action, by which the mingling of the blue with the yellow calls into existence the green. We imagine, for we do not know for certain, that the blue and the yellow liquids consist of particles of extreme smallness;[1] and that, by some motion of these particles, which has hitherto escaped all analysis,

[1] I do not use the popular term 'infinitesimally small,' because such words have no actual meaning and are really nonsense.

their position towards one another is changed, so as to affect the retina of the eye with a new sensation which we call green.

20. Here are obviously two distinct species of knowledge: we actually know that there is a difference between the essential natures of blue, yellow, and green, so far as they affect the retina of our eye, that is, our brain. But, of the mode in which these hypothetical molecules really move about so as to cause a green result, we are totally in the dark. We infer, from a multitude of experiments, that all the varieties in the qualities of material objects are the consequences of what we now technically term 'motion.' Some thinkers go so far as to believe that everything in the universe is a 'mode of motion,' including our thoughts, our feelings, and our very selves. This molecular motion, in truth, is, according to these 'thinkers,' a more amazing example of self-knowledge than it ever before entered into the brain of man to conceive. By various modes of motion, these molecules not only produce the countless phenomena of the universe, but they also call into existence their own knowledge of this universe, that is, their knowledge of themselves. Indeed, the feats of these small entities are quite equal to

anything that was ever attributed to the Eternal God by those who believe in Him. If it is true that not only the pen with which I am writing, and the paper on which I write, but also the thoughts in my own mind which I am setting forth, are nothing but the result of the movements of these marvellous little bodies, then it is no longer impossible to imagine that once upon a time there was nothing, and then suddenly God came into existence.

21. However, I am not now engaged in exposing the suicidal nature of that creed, which may be defined in the formula, 'There is no God, but only atoms, and the atoms are their own prophets.' That which concerns those who believe in God, is to grasp the fact that to know God in Himself is one thing, and to know the mode in which His nature acts is another; and that the popular habit of confounding these two kinds of knowledge is a most serious hindrance to our attaining any such knowledge of Him as can be shaped into an actual idea, and thus be made capable of being expressed in human language. Words, let me remind the reader, when they are not the instrument for the expression of ideas, are the gibberish which constitutes the conjuror's stock-

in-trade. They are not the gold and silver money of commerce, but the counters of the card-table, or the playthings of the nursery. Every species of creed or formulary which contains terms to which the mind attaches no idea is a toy to play with. It is not the instrument by which we hold intercourse with the Invisible. If the mode in which the Divine source of all life acts in relation to ourselves cannot be made the substance of an idea, which can be uttered in human phraseology, it cannot be uttered by us at all.

22. Further still, it is essential that we should not suffer ourselves to be carried away by the prevalent delusion, respecting ideas themselves. An idea, apart from some objectively existing real thing, has no existence. As a matter of fact, there are a vast number of purely imaginary existences, which pass by the name of abstract ideas, but which are in truth nothing but sounds uttered by the lips, or marks written upon paper. They are the most universal among the mischievous dreams which delude our unfortunate race. In themselves they are often harmless, and a man and his fellows are none the worse for believing in the reality of abstract ideas. A man is none the worse father, husband, or citizen, when he uses such words as

goodness, badness, redness, amiability, freshness, and a thousand similar figments, as if they possessed a reality, such as that possessed by a good man, or a bad man, or a red apple, or an amiable woman, or a fresh breeze. But it is a most serious matter when these words are mistaken for the representatives of real ideas; that is, the conception which the mind forms of actually existing entities. In religious thought, and reasoning especially, this confounding of the real with the non-existent has wrought most terrible evils. For instance, sin is often spoken of as an actual reality, and contrasted with merit, and described as having certain necessary qualities and deserving a certain necessary treatment; while, as a matter of fact, there is no such thing as 'sin' at all. There are individual bad men, and there are individual good men, just as there are individual fresh roses, and individual red apples, but the 'sin' of which St. Paul writes is only a word, and is in the most absolute contrast to the real 'sinners,' who are the subject of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

23. Nor is there any hope of the general attainment of any true knowledge of God in His action towards the universe in general, and towards man in particular, until the teachers of the multitude

have cleared their own minds of this lamentable delusion. The evil begins, moreover, in the very earliest education of the men who are prepared to teach the profoundest truths to others. What can be expected from the teaching of the ordinary ecclesiastic whose mathematical training has begun with an assumption that abstract geometrical truths exist apart from actual geometrical things? We are taught in our early years to believe in straightness and circularity, and that astounding ghost which is called infinity, negative, or positive, and has a special figure (∞) assigned to it. In all these mathematical processes, called abstract, the minds of the teacher and the student are in reality engaged in working upon some real lines, circles, triangles, and so forth, which the eye pictures to itself. What both teacher and student are reasoning about, are the visible and tangible phenomena of some solid triangular or circular body. Clear the imagination of that actual solid triangle, or circular plane, or sphere, which it has before it, and every conception vanishes like the supposed ghosts at cock-crow, and nothing but a blank remains.[1]

[1] An especially instructive instance of the slavery to words to which mathematicians unwarily submit themselves, is to be seen in the manner in which they speak of 'negative infinity,' and describe the operation of dividing a positive quantity by 'nothing,' and thus generating 'infinity' as a quotient, as if this were a real

24. Thus far, then, I will consider that the reader has gone with me, in laying down an unassailable basis for our inquiry into the nature of all real religious knowledge. In attempting to decide what we can know, and what we cannot know concerning God, and by consequence what we can, or cannot know concerning His relationship to ourselves and to Christianity, we must employ our faculties just as we employ them in all other matters. Words without clear ideas attached to them are tricks; and ideas, by which the mind does not grasp the nature or the mode of acting of some positively existing things are shapeless ghosts, as unreal as the visions of our dreams.

25. If, accordingly, we desire to *know* anything of God, as He is in Himself, or as we are related to Him, it is obvious that we can go no further than the knowledge we possess of our own minds, and of the universe of which our senses take cog-

process, akin to the dividing of some substance whose reality can be conceived, by another quantity as small as can be conceived, and thus generating a quotient as large as can be conceived. This last is an actual process; but to pass on thus to the next step and to write down the formula $\frac{a}{0} = \infty$ is to pass into the land of dreams, and creates a habit of loose thinking, tending to foster that fondness for words without meaning which is one of the characteristic infirmities of human nature in its present stage of civilisation.

nisance. All beyond this range must be empty verbiage, and nothing more. To think, therefore, of knowing God as He is in Himself, is a presumptuous and monstrous absurdity. We can have no conception at all of His essential nature, because that nature is beyond our own, and is, therefore, inconceivable by us. Every creed or formulary which makes any such assertion, is a jumble of sounds and conjuror's stock-in-trade, and the fatal instrument by which we prevent ourselves from learning what can be learnt of any practical value to us, in our ignorance and in our sorrows, in our life and in our death. Obviously, then, our first course should be to make up our minds, as far as may be, on those particular details in which we can know nothing of God. And here I must entreat my reader not to start away in indignation, if I call his attention to certain truths, absolutely undeniable, but which, nevertheless, form no part of the popular religion of to-day.

26. In the first place, we do not know whether there is one God, or many Gods. The nature of the Unseen, and Source of all life, is so entirely beyond all possible conception of ours, that we cannot apply to it any of those laws of number, which are derived from what our senses tell us, of sepa-

rate, individual, and limited substances. Once more I entreat my readers to hear me, while I set forth the glory of the Eternal in a manner with which they are not familiar. I say then, that all our conceptions of oneness, or duality, or triplicity, or quadruplicity, or of number in general, are derived from our personal counting up of one, two, three, four, or more objects, which are limited in size and in power. They are not images of the unity of God, adapted to our finite understandings. They are the *invention* of our finite understandings; and when we thus employ them to express our belief that God is one, we are degrading Him to the level of our poor, feeble, finite selves. There is but one term which can be correctly applied to Him, and which is in use in the Hebrew Scriptures. He is the great and eternal 'I Am. We call Him 'God,' and nothing more; and it is 'joy to make mention of His name,' as Hooker has said; 'and our greatest eloquence is our silence,' and, as Hooker adds in one of the most profound phrases which the thought of man ever conceived, 'when we confess without confession that His glory is inexplicable.'

27. What we do know concerning the eternal nature of God is this, that in action this essence is

One. If there is anything in that Incomprehensible Being which approaches to a non-unity, such as finite intelligences understand by non-unity, there must be absolute *unanimity* in the Deity with whom we have to do. The entire Universe cannot spring from the conflicting activities of powers, out of whose strife its tremendous mystery has arisen. Speculators in ages long gone by as to the origin of that struggle between two 'principles,' which is one of the favourite words in use among those who wish to be esteemed philosophers and theological teachers, have imagined that the 'evil,' that is, the misery that is in the world, is caused by the obstinacy with which the 'evil principle' opposes and undermines the beneficent action of the 'good principle.' This fancy has assumed various shapes, including the beliefs which have obtained possession of many of the nominal followers of Jesus Christ. Such a device for accounting for evil, including guilt and suffering, could not have been invented, if men had remembered that in such a conflict from all eternity, one or other of the powers must have been victorious over the other. If we adopt the usual phraseology, either God or the devil must have conquered. If the devil still had the power to mar the work of God, it must have been because God willed that it should be so,

unless the power of the devil were actually equal to the power of God.

28. And this is not a mere private opinion or speculation of my own. It is a necessary truth. It is impossible that two combatants should continue their conflict from all eternity, unless the one were literally as mighty as the other. Let us not go on deluding ourselves with the cowardly subterfuge, that it is blasphemous to attribute any 'sort of evil' to the will of God. The real blasphemy consists in imagining that anything in the Universe can exist, or be done, which is contrary to the will of the Eternal One. This is one of those truths concerning the Incomprehensible Deity of which we *can* attain a perfect certainty through our finite reason. We do not attempt to penetrate into the secrets of the Eternal, or to invent any theory as to the mode in which He causes things to be as they are. Nevertheless reason, however limited in itself, understands the difference between the possible, and the impossible, as such. It is evident, too, that if two beings are actually hostile to one another, one or the other must in the end be the victor. And, without comprehending an infinity of time, as such, Reason perceives that it does not require an infinity of

time to enable the more powerful of two combatants to vanquish the weaker, and to cause all things to be obedient to his predominant will.

29. Whatever, therefore, may be the inherent unity or non-unity of the Unseen God, a perfect unanimity must reign through all His works, unless it can be shown from those works that a conflict has been eternally, and is still, going on between two powers, inherently equal in intelligence and strength. Now, *is* there any proof whatsoever that such a battle is now being fought within us, and in the entire Universe? The physical structure of the heavens and earth continues to be, what it is, through what for convenience we call molecular motion. But all this presents no difficulty to our understandings. It is the incessant moral conflict, the struggles between one passion and another, the helplessness of man in the conflict from which he cannot escape, the universality of human misery, and the fact that no little of this misery is the direct result of man's passions and man's ignorance, which have given a sort of plausibility to the various well-known theories of a struggle between a good and wise God and a malicious evil being. That there is a sort of *primâ facie* plausibility in these theories or dogmas, I do

not then deny, whether they take the shape of the doctrine of the ancient Manicheism, or the hypothesis about the 'evil' inherent in matter, in which some non-theological speculators have indulged, or the living Satanic personage who is believed in by many Christian churches, or the evil 'principle' which is one of the latest inventions of those who repudiate all belief in what they term a personal devil. I can quite understand the eagerness with which minds that are afraid of truth in all its terrible majesty should then take shelter beneath the storms of doubt and mental agony, with which they are assailed when they look abroad upon the lives of men, or within upon their own helplessness and pangs of pain.

30. Yet, all these speculations vanish before a close examination of the facts of human life, and of the world in which man passes his days. The social and individual life of man, his outer surroundings, and his inner self, are as undeniably a portion of one organic whole, and bear the impress of one agency, of one self-consistent and unchanging will, as do the movements of the planets, the development of a plant from its seed, or the structure of a chronometer made by human ingenuity. I am speaking of course only of what we know, and

not of any so-called theological explanation. And thus, confining myself to facts, it is to me abundantly evident that the whole of this inexplicable life is the work of One Being, who is never inconsistent with himself; and that the terrible mystery, the agony of our mortal life, is self-consistent in its minutest details. Its littleness and its greatness, its sorrow and its joy, its successes and its failures, its ecstasy and its anguish, are elements in this mighty organisation, which, whatever else it may be, is essentially One.

31. That it is thus inexplicable, is undeniable; but why so? Because it is the work of One who is not finite, as we are finite. He who is above us, has not thought fit to communicate to us the reason why we are what we are, and not something totally different. It has pleased Him to make the acquisition of any certain knowledge respecting His own nature a matter of extreme difficulty; but what can we say when we are asked why it is so? All we can do is to reply, 'I do not know.' The multitude of self-styled religious people are ready to believe anything concerning God, provided that it requires no great effort of thought, or is stated in strong phrases or terms without any meaning. But I am not

attempting to please this multitude. I ask myself, as others ask themselves, what is the origin of *all* that is; call it good, or call it evil, and I can make no reply but one, and with that reply I am satisfied. It is the will of God. If my readers exclaim that this is horrible and blasphemous, I answer, 'Not so.' You call it horrible and blasphemous, because you imagine that you know God as He is, and that you understand what you describe as His attributes. For myself, I have no knowledge of any divine attributes except such as I can gather from what He has done, and what He is ever doing. When you speak of an 'attribute' of God, except as a convenient phrase, I have no conception what you mean. When you speak of the 'Will of God,' except as a convenient phrase, I do not know what you mean. All I do know is, that His will must be totally different, in its mode of operation, from my own will; and as for my own will, the more I learn to comprehend what is the mental process by which I 'will' anything, the more hopelessly bewildered I feel. I am conscious of a certain capacity of choice between one course and another, and when I do thus actually choose one course rather than the other, I say that this is the effect of my will. But *how* my mind operates in coming to this decision, I cannot tell. I study the move-

ments of my inclinations within me; I strive to detect the influence which my reason, and my sense of duty, exercise on my decision; I strive to find out how far I am free, and how far I am powerless beneath the sway of inward desires; I labour, in a word, to discover what it is that I, the individual man, actually do when I employ my will in active exercise; and what do I learn? Nothing. My bewilderment is hopeless, I see no clue to the labyrinth of struggling inclinations and habits. I can only *act* as if I comprehended it all, and as if I not only saw that in some sense I were free to choose, but also how, and by what process, I chose.

32. Then I pass on to attempt to understand what is the meaning of the phrase, 'the will of God,' and I sink prostrate on the earth in self-abasement. If I cannot understand my own feeble will, how can I attain even to the most shadowy thoughts as to how the Eternal One wills anything, and then carries this will into execution? I can repeat as glibly as I please the usual common-place phrases as to the supreme will of God, but I know at the same time that to attempt to discern how God wills, and executes His will, is the wildest audacity. My mind can form no con-

ception at all of the reality, such as can be put into definite language. And, after all my strivings after some correct formula of speech which shall be indeed an actual explanation of the true meaning of the words, 'the will of God,' I have arrived at this conclusion, 'the world is what it is, because God is what He is.' This phrase conveys an intelligible and correct statement of all that mortal reason can *know*, as to the essential relation between God and the Universe. The Universe, including man, is what it is, because God is what He is. We thus develop all that is intelligible to ourselves, in the one true description of God Himself, viz., that He is the only great 'I Am,' into an additional conception concerning Him and ourselves, which is at once intelligible and true. Although this conception refers to the acts of an Infinite Being, our finite reason perceives that it is a truth which cannot be denied, while it states all that our reason is capable of defining, and avoids the faintest attempt to comprehend how the Divine Being both wills, and executes His will.

33. Knowing then that we are what we are, because God is what He is, we approach, without either terror or audacity, the consideration of the

practical question, as to the extent to which God is the 'Author of evil;' according to the phrase in use at times when theologians have been real thinkers, and not superficial disputants, such as they are in our own time. And the day must come, and may perhaps be near, when these old problems will again present themselves for solution, so far as they can be solved at all. If Christianity is again to become a religion, and not merely a ritual; if the soul in its mortal agony is to have something to repose upon more consoling than disputes whether there are two or seven sacraments, and whether the pope or the bishops are infallible, it must go back to the questionings of ages past, whether Roman or Protestant, whether Athenian or Indian. Men must learn definitively what they can know, and what they cannot know, and what things must be true; although they can go no further than to understand the limits of their own knowledge. I ask the reader then to reflect what facts are necessarily included in the truth, that the Will of God is supreme; that nothing is done in the Universe, except through this will, and that when we assert that God permits a thing to be done, it is equivalent to an assertion that He causes it to be done. The distinction between God's causing a thing to be done,

and His permitting a thing to be done, without actually causing it, is a purely verbal distinction, and implies a knowledge on our part of the essential nature of God, which is impossible. From the fact that we can literally form no conception of the mode in which He executes His will, or of the mode in which He wills anything, it is obvious that we can form no conception of the difference between His causing a result by His direct will, and His permitting some act on our part, without actually causing it. We cannot form any conception of what He does in either one case or the other, and consequently we cannot define it in words, or pretend that we know that there is any difference at all. Our only wisdom, our only reverence, our only reasonable act, is to say without hesitation that our ignorance is complete and profound; and being so, there is but one course open to us, and that is, an abstinence from every species of speech which attempts to define the unknowable and the undefinable.

34. When I say, accordingly, that God is the cause of all the misery and evil that is in the world, I simply state a fact that cannot be doubted; and I am confident that, in the end, all men who are capable of thinking on such matters will over-

come the cowardice and the cloudiness of thought which now deter them from facing the impiety of the ignorant multitude, which denies the reality of the supreme power of God. At the same time, I decline to follow the multitude and their teachers who profess that they have some distinct conception as to the nature of moral good and evil, apart from their experimental knowledge of the will of God, as shown in the world of men and women, which is the result of His will and His foreknowledge of all things, from all eternity. Apart from that which is in accordance with the Divine nature, as made manifest in His works, we do not know what is evil and what is good in any moral sense. We have no other standard of right and wrong; at least, I myself do not know of any other standard, nor am I shocked or disturbed by the exclamation which such an avowal is apt to call forth from persons who judge everything by the opinions, or mock opinions, of the class with which they associate, or the 'views'[1] of the religious teachers, who stand to them in the place of an infallible pope. No man, so far as I have ever been

[1] This word 'views' is one of the oddest and most significant productions of our modern English religionism, and could only have been invented in its modern sense by a generation in love with haziness, and possessed by a notion that religious and philosophical truth, and even historical truth, is the result of a species of compro-

able to ascertain, has any standard of right and wrong, which is not either purely fanciful and arbitrary, or what is derived ultimately from the study of the facts of human life, as they are learnt from experience. I call that good, which appears to be in accordance with these facts, when they are so regulated by personal and social law as to tend to the most perfect development of the faculties of human nature. Those things which do not thus tend, I call evil, and I am unable to use these terms in any other sense.

35. Further, when it is said that God causes the one, and only permits the other to be done, I am unable to attach any different significations to the two phrases, because I am destitute of all conception as to the manner in which God either 'causes' things or 'permits' things. I know nothing whatever of the subject, because I cannot 'by searching find out God.' I do not understand *how* He causes, and therefore I do not understand how He *permits* without causing. Nor can these

mise. This 'viewiness' of temperament used to be mercilessly exposed by the chief leaders of the Tractarian Movement of 1833.

Another good service which was done by them to the cause of truth, as such, was the invention of the word 'unreal,' as expressing that peculiar modification of religious cant which was at that time fashionable, and which appears, from the 'religious' newspapers and books of to-day, to be still flourishing in many quarters.

questions be shirked under any pretence that such matters should be avoided, from the fear that their discussion will make the world more miserable than it is. It is this very shirking which, unless my whole argument is rotten to the foundation, has done and is doing such boundless mischief to man, and has prevented him from acquiring that knowledge of God which is possible and real, and which alone can regenerate humanity. God is not glorified by the falsehoods which we utter concerning Him, nor does mankind advance in piety and morality by being fed upon the refuse of the philosophies and religions of other days. God is honoured by men, when they say concerning Him, just what they know, and nothing more. And when it is asserted that to allege that God is the author of evil, because He is the author of all things, I entrench myself in the impregnable truth that I know nothing as to what *is* good, and what *is* evil, except from the phenomena of human life, as they are observed, classed, and made the premisses of an unanswerable logic by the thinkers of all ages, each one learning more than was known by his immediate predecessors.

36. What we do unquestionably know, and which it is preposterous to deny, is that God is the

direct cause of the awful misery which exists around us, which we feel in ourselves, and which has existed since the first dawn of history. In what way misery is connected with that which we call moral evil, we know nothing. To deny that God is the cause of this anguish, is arrant cowardice, and does no honour to the true God, as He is; and it is not any fictitious Deity that I am writing about. And I repeat that this mighty agony is caused by that which we describe as the will of Him who is the actual source of the life of the Universe. The miserable romances which prevail concerning God and His imaginary nature, have no more foundation in fact, than the 'Arabian Nights' are accurate pictures of the political and social life of the East. Any assertion that God is a Being who wills the present happiness of man is simply untrue. It is the will of the real Deity that 'man that is born of a woman should have but a short time to live and be full of misery.' Do I honour God by denying this? No! I humbly bow my head, and once again repeat that God is incomprehensible in Himself, and that I have not the faintest conception *why* He makes us miserable, and that all we can know on the subject is, that we are miserable, because God is what He is.

37. Equally incomprehensible, though it is the reverse of distressing, is the existence of laughter, as the creation of a Being such as we know the Almighty to be. How can we conceive what element there is in the hidden nature of the Eternal which corresponds in any way to the sense of wit and humour in ourselves? Here is a question which is rarely asked, but it must be asked by every one who would attempt any such correct knowledge of the Divinity as can really be attained. Why, then, has God formed in all rational creatures, except those in the lowest state of barbarism, the capacity for enjoying a jest? Why is it, that this capacity for enjoying what is absurd is one of the first signs of advancing civilisation? and why is the same capacity one of the earliest accompaniments of the growth of reason in a child? We cannot tell, just as we cannot tell why it pleases God to cause that child to live a life of bodily suffering from the day of its birth. It is all unknown to us, but in recognising the fact, we are enabled to give ourselves up more unreservedly to the enjoyment of jesting and every species of pleasure which is of a kindred nature. So soon as we have thoroughly grasped the conception of the Almighty as One, as well as Incomprehensible, we gain in our faculties of enjoyment as certainly as we gain in

our consolations in suffering. No conception of the terrible mystery into which we cannot penetrate, can be otherwise than incomplete and mischievous, which does not distinctly take hold of the fact, that our laughter as well as our tears springs from Him who foresaw and fore-ordained our whole existence from all eternity. Can we alter these facts by pretending that they are not what they are, or by inventing some sort of fancy how they came to be what they are without the will of God ordaining them?

38. Unhappily, we all of us wish to believe that the Supreme Deity is a being different from what we perceive Him to be. On all sides there is a sort of agreement to say nothing unpleasant about Him 'with whom we have to do.' We live in the midst of a world full of ghosts and goblins, which are the invention of generations long gone by. According to the fanciful stories which are circulating all about us, God is an amiable, but half-helpless kind of personage, who is not master in the world which He has created, and whatever wretchedness there is amongst us is not of His doing, and when we are guilty of any acts or thoughts of which He disapproves, He as it were stands by, and lets us and some bad unseen

power have our own way, and then He enters and punishes or rewards us, as the case may be. According to what are termed the Divine attributes, this system of dealing with poor humanity would be most cruel and unjust, and therefore we have invented a large variety of devices for evading it, every one of which is tantamount to an assertion that God is not really master in His own universe. They are all, more or less, of the same kind, from the earliest speculations of Oriental philosophy, down to the last new and offensive inventions of some Romish nun, whose proper abode would be either a lunatic asylum or a Protestant penitentiary.

CHAPTER III.

How it is possible to know what God is not and what He cannot do.—Different senses in which communications are supposed to be made to man by a superior power.—Necessary meaning of the word 'revelation.'—The Roman doctrine concerning faith.—The word 'personality' cannot be applied to God.—Use of the word 'person' in the Athanasian Creed.—Biblical narrative of the creation and fall of man.—Real introduction of the ideas of right and wrong.—Analysis of religious belief.

39. THUS, then, we begin our studies concerning the Almighty God. We do not attempt to decide what we can know until we have learnt what we cannot know. And thus we lay hold, with a firm grasp, of the truth, that while it is totally impossible to understand God, as He is, in His own essence, it is by no means impossible to learn what He is not, and what He cannot do, although He is God. This last truth is, I am aware, blasphemous in the judgment of those who in reality place themselves on an equality with God, and speak of His being omnipotent with a fluency of talk as if they personally comprehended what omnipotence is. They start away when it is implied that there are certain

things which God cannot do. Their habitual way of thinking and speaking on such subjects is so shallow and frivolous that they forget that human reason cannot possibly comprehend God, or understand why He does certain things, or how He does anything. They are, nevertheless, as they think, at liberty to allege that certain things which exist are *not* the result of His will; while yet it is shocking to imagine that we *know* that there are limits to His power.

40. First, then, we do not *know* that the power of God is, in any sense of the word, unlimited. All that we do know is, that in almost all respects His power is greater than our own, and greater than we can by the utmost efforts of our reason conceive it to be. But this is totally different from knowing and understanding that it is absolutely without any limits whatsoever. On this point we are incapable of forming any conception, and therefore we are incapable of possessing any knowledge. Here, in the words of Hooker, 'our safest eloquence is our silence.' But not so when we labour in the other direction. It is quite certain that there are acts which are beyond the power of God. For example, He cannot create another God. He cannot call into being another Substance which shall be equal

to Himself, because He Himself is eternal in the past, while any new Deity would not have existed as God, from all eternity. Again, God cannot undo that which has already taken place. The sun rose yesterday in the east; God cannot undo that fact, and cause the sun to have risen yesterday in the west. Again, He cannot alter His own nature, or make Himself to be that which He has not been from all eternity. We know all this as an absolute certainty, without comprehending anything concerning the actual essential nature of God.

Further still, God cannot communicate to an inferior understanding any perfect knowledge of Himself, as He is in His own nature. The reason is obvious. To understand what God is one must be God. None but God can comprehend Himself, just as a dog cannot comprehend a man, and as the trees cannot comprehend the birds that sing among their branches. Since, therefore, God cannot call into existence any other God, with an essence identical with His own, so He cannot communicate to us, His inferiors, any actual knowledge of His own incommunicable nature.

41. And to this I earnestly beg my readers to give their fullest attention. It is not a difficult truth to understand, and to cling to with firm hold,

as soon as the mind has clearly taken in what is meant by the words employed, and what is necessarily involved in them. We shall never attain to such a knowledge of things invisible, and our hopes of a life hereafter, as can really be attained, until we have shaken ourselves free from this network of confused words and thoughts which hampers the action of our reason, and prevents us from making any actual progress beyond the mere talk of childhood. There is no subject on which more meaningless and suicidal phrases are bandied about than that of the revelation of things incomprehensible. It is one of those grand, high-sounding words with which people conceal their ignorance and flatter their own presumption and that of others, and construct idols innumerable. Perhaps no word was ever invented which has been turned to such evil purposes, or has so fatally served the purpose of standing between man and any real knowledge of God. With some people it is really nothing more than a corrupt Latin theatrical word; with others, it is a printed book, badly translated from several Syriac, Hebrew, and Greek writings. With others, it is the Latin writings of an Italian ecclesiastic, who says that God has told him that all these Latin sentences are as true as the multiplication table.

42. But, whatever the variations in form, in substance the confusion of thought is the same. Everywhere it is assumed that the Supreme Deity, or some being greater than man, has communicated information concerning the acts and the nature of beings who, in the scale of existence, are far above our feeble and helpless intellect. Yet is not this a mere illusion? How could our nature receive any information from God which it is beyond our reason to comprehend? Let no one think that in asking such a question I am pretending to place a limit upon the power of that God whom I know. It is upon human capacity that I place the limit; I only call attention to the fact that we are not God, and that in whatever theological terms we choose to assert that God has revealed something to us which is beyond our reason, those words must ever remain empty sounds, which it is a dishonour to God to repeat, and to call them revelations of His secrets to us.

43. Can we, then, know nothing more concerning God than can be understood by our natural reason? Unquestionably we cannot. We can *know* nothing of Him, except by investing Him with attributes drawn from our own nature, and He can reveal to us nothing more, because we are not capable of

understanding Him. Revelation is popularly supposed to mean the communication of ideas in human language. And it must be so, although it is the nearly universal custom to attribute to those words, when thus employed, a significance which they had not before. But is not this mere jugglery? The words are human; how can they be made anything else but human? We do not honour God by claiming a power for ourselves which we do not possess. We do not acquire any adequate idea of the mightiness of the ocean, by standing on the shore with a little cup in our hand and protesting to the winds and clouds that we can take up the waves in that little cup, and empty the seas to their lowest depths. Yet what are all these sermons, hymns, and meditations, and theological treatises about God and sin, and His wrath, and His will, and the connection between His substance and the substance of Jesus, but so many empty boastings that our reason approaches as closely to the Divine mind as the cup with which we tell the thunder and the lightning that we will empty the ocean and make the dry land appear?

44. That which is really the duty of a religious minded man, not a theological partisan, is to ask himself what he individually means when he speaks

of a doctrine concerning God or Christ or any matter of fact being revealed to him. A Roman Catholic tells me, that it is revealed by God that a certain Jewish child was born unlike all other children, in having a nature 'free from sin.' Now what does he mean when he says this? He means that it is revealed to him through the Pope, that this child was free from sin. But it is nothing to him that the Pope says so, and that the Pope is infallible, unless it is also revealed to him, the individual Roman Catholic, that the Pope is infallible. But how can he know that the Pope is infallible, except by a personal revelation from God to his own mind? It is not of the least consequence that the Pope should be infallibly right in what he says about Mary the mother of Jesus, unless he, the individual Roman Catholic, is infallibly right, in what he thinks about the Pope. We have an indefeasible right to ask him how he knows this. I know indeed, what he will say. He will reply, that he has 'faith,' and that by faith he becomes infallibly right about the Pope, and all that the Pope says. But what is this but a shifting of the difficulty, instead of answering it?

45. Supposing, moreover, that such a thing as faith' can possibly exist, which is about as reason-

able a supposition as a geographical theory, that the centre of gravity of the earth is on the top of the Great Pyramid—supposing this, I say, now does any Roman Catholic know infallibly that he possesses this faith? It is utterly useless to him as a reasonable being, unless he knows this without the possibility of error. The connection between the one doctrine and the other breaks down, and he is just as much in the dark as he was before the figment of papal infallibility; and the divine revelation about Mary's sinlessness vanishes like a bubble in the breezy sunlight. It is gay for a few moments with all the colours of the rainbow, and then it bursts, and is seen no more.

46. So it is with the idea of the certainty which multitudes of well-intentioned and sincerely religious persons of all countries and creeds imagine that they possess with regard to a 'revelation;' supposing that any individual doctrine is revealed, how does any individual man or woman become certain of this, unless he or she is personally gifted with infallibility? Let no one start at the notion, that he personally can be thus gifted. We are all of us capable of being thus gifted, provided that our reasoning faculties are complete. We know without possibility of error, that two and two can-

not make five, and that a square erected on the hypothenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the squares erected on the two other sides. We know infallibly that a material substance cannot be in two places at once. We know that out of nothing nothing can come; and the great important question to us, as living, conscious, suffering souls, is this, Can we be thus personally certain that truths which (as is supposed) are really revealed to others are to be taken as revealed to ourselves? Let no one imagine that my aim is to show that all knowledge concerning God and Christ is impossible, because we are not infallible; because we see the absurdity of the Roman Catholic's fancy, that he personally is infallibly informed by God, that the mother of Jesus Christ was not like other women. My object is to point out the recklessness with which honest and religious persons fill their minds with a jumble of formularies and ideas, supposed to be infallibly true, but whose real effect is to prevent them from acquiring that real knowledge concerning Jesus Christ and the true God of Heaven and Earth which is really practically within our reach, and which ought to be our strength and consolation in the struggles of life and in the hour of death.

47. That an earnest and even passionate desire

for the attainment of some sort of certainty in matters of religious belief now exists in the more intelligent classes of this country, cannot surely be denied. The criticisms of the scientific world, the pretensions of the old sacerdotal party, the Romish imitations of the Ritualists, the vagueness and timidity of the party which goes by the name of the Broad Church, have united to arouse a longing for something, be it ever so limited in range, which can be known as actually true concerning God and the life after death. Men cry out in their solitude for some certain knowledge, which will sustain them at those times when their soul is alone with God; when the aid which the imagination derives from unity with their fellow-worshippers is withdrawn; when no encouragement is to be obtained from ministers of religion and the wisest of advisers, and the mind says to itself, 'I am not alone, for I am with God.' The number of those who thus think and feel, is not to be measured by the number of those who openly avow their discontent with the condition of religious opinion in the Anglican Church, or the more educated members of non-Anglican communities. The despotism of English society in the matter of religious opinion is still so formidable, and enters so widely into the whole social political, and University life of the country,

that tens of thousands of men, and women also, maintain a strict reserve as to the existence of this scepticism, and derive hardly any satisfaction from such belief as they do hold, with more or less faintness of conviction.

48. The increasing culture of the faculties of young women, and still more young men, has led to very natural inquiries into the truth and value of the religious teaching, and of the formularies in which the last generation was brought up. It does not create the same amount of outward dissatisfaction with clerical teaching which might have been looked for, because there is no increase in the general religious earnestness or enthusiasm of the country. People remain conservatives in religious practices when they are not brought in contact either with Ritualism or Rome; though their advance in freedom of thought in secular matters is bold, and even rash. But this is no proof that among the clergy and laity of both sexes there are not very many who in their inmost minds have given up everything that can be called orthodoxy, and who are yet profoundly religious and who yearn habitually for something that actually *is* a knowledge of God, and of the life and death of

Jesus of Nazareth, if anything is really to be learnt concerning that life and that death.

49. To such devout and courageous thinkers I would begin by pointing out to them the true nature of that phrase, 'The personality of God', whose use or rejection is often regarded as the touchstone of a man's belief in God, or his atheism. It is nearly universally held by earnest and religious persons that, to refuse to believe in the personality of the Divine Essence, is equivalent to believing that there is no God, or, that at the utmost He can be nothing to us, and we can know nothing about Him which can console and guide us in life and strengthen us in death.

50. Such persons I must ask to reflect what this word 'personality' does really mean as made use of by themselves, and by the general body of religious persons. What it means in the mouths of the non-religious portion of the scientific world is not our concern. It is not necessarily an immoral thing to hold that there is no proof attainable by our faculties of the existence of any such species of being as we mean by God. Almost all those who take a zealous interest in theological affairs, including many of the most capable and the best instructed, hold

that there is no *certain* proof of God's existence. When such reasoners go on to accuse the positive atheist of wickedness, they are themselves guilty of uncharitableness and misinterpretation. This is the usual Romish practice with respect to those who repudiate the Romish religion. But it has not the slightest foundation in the laws of right reason, nor in the practice of Jesus Christ and His Apostles.

51. This, however, is not my own case. I hold that it is certain that God exists. I have no doubt whatever on the matter. I never did doubt it from the time when I was sufficiently acquainted with the laws of reason, and sufficiently practised in their use, to be entitled to form a positive judgment on matters of certainty and uncertainty. I have also enjoyed as long an experience as any living man of those modifications in opinion which result from an increasing knowledge of the types of life, both objective and subjective, which exist in the Christian World.

52. And the result of the whole is this, that while my own fundamental belief, both philosophical and theological, has never wavered, I have come to regard with far more tolerance those who are overwhelmed with the difficulties of questions re-

lating to the visible and the invisible, and am more anxious that honest men and women should understand their own and each other's phraseology. The longer I live, the more I desire that the atheist should cease to think that a Trinitarian is necessarily a fool, and that the Trinitarian should not hold that every atheist is certainly a knave. I know how extremely difficult it is for men to do justice to the motives of those from whom they differ on affairs of vast practical moment. And as the whole matter of religion is something very different from squabbles about ecclesiastical robes and church establishments, and disputes about this or that text in this or that ancient MS., what I anxiously labour for, is that men of opposing views should cease to think of each other, as unquestionably rogues; and secondly, that each disputant should know precisely what both he and his adversary mean by the words they employ.

53. Of all such words none are of such moment as these, 'The Personality of God.' Believers in God, and in what they conceive to be His Omnipotence, in reality are simply denying His infinity altogether by the use of this phrase. The word personality, as generally employed by Christians, is a plain assertion, that God is a being, limited in His

Substance. In other words, He is the same kind of being as ourselves. There is no possible use of the word which implies that God is different from us.

54. The term 'person,' as it occurs in the Athanasian Creed, is employed in quite a different sense, if it really has any meaning in the minds of the present day. As uttered in this Creed, it implies something essentially different from the word 'substance'. I am not, it should be observed, putting forward any theory of my own as to the device by which that document is endowed with any meaning at all. The popular theory, whose original inventor I do not know, professes that when it is stated that there are three persons and one God, God is meant to be described as one in *substance*; which, as I have already said, appears to me to be more than our faculties justify us in asserting, since they do not enable us to understand anything at all concerning the Divine Substance in Itself. Everything that we know concerning the Divine Substance is, that it is unanimous in all its operations. There is nothing therefore misleading in our habitually speaking of the one God, provided we do not thereby assume that we know anything about Him which it is impossible we should know.

55. But when it comes to the asserting that there are three Persons and one God, it is necessary that we should introduce some signification of the word 'person' which is different from the word 'substance.' To say that a being can be both three and one at the same time is simply a falsehood; and to say that while we attach, in this Creed, an intelligible meaning to one of these terms, and no meaning at all to the other, is so extravagant an absurdity that it would have been all along put aside, as an impious trifling, if we did not know that it had thus been used, by rational and honest people, for hundreds and hundreds of years, and is now being so used by nearly every man whom we meet with, and who is not affronted at being asked to explain himself. Now and then, it is true, some bold and acute man, who is either personally or professionally interested in writing consistently on religious things, comes forward with some device for getting out of this shocking misuse of language on the most sacred of all subjects. Such was Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, who in his 'Treatise on Logic,' proposed to use the word 'person' in its Latin sense, as signifying a character; a meaning originally derived from the masks which were worn by the actors on the classical stage. This sense is no doubt often adopted by those of

the Anglican clergy who are satisfied with any ready-made meaning that presents itself, and which may help them out of their difficulties.

56. This device, however, was of course vehemently denounced as 'heretical' by the better informed of the Anglican clergy, and would not have been listened to for a moment in the Roman Church. And they were right, though not on their own grounds. The word 'person,' as used in the meaning of a character, was a glaring novelty, and could not be seriously defended by those who pretended to 'orthodoxy' among the dissenting clergy and laity. The sense in which it was first made use of is, indeed, lost, having its origin in those speculations concerning all existing substances, and all human ideas, which are expounded with extraordinary ingenuity by Plato. It is, at the same time, impossible that we should now understand the meaning of Plato himself in many of his speculations and modes of argument. His words remain, and are sometimes difficult enough to us to translate, even if we are satisfied that we are in possession of any exact English equivalent for his terminology. To those who have realised the fleetingness of all those delicate shades of thought which are universal in the style and the matter of Plato's writings, it will

appear an almost impossible thing to accomplish a perfectly intelligible analysis of the philosophic ideas of the various theologians, who gradually evolve the dogmas which finally crystallised into precise words in the Athanasian Creed.

57. With all this we have nothing to do. Our duty is to decide how far those who believe in God can now make use of the word personality in regard to their belief. How is the word person employed by us on all occasions when we use it? It is incessantly used by men of science, who protest that they cannot accept the doctrine of the personality of God. And they are right. The word person always means that which is human and limited. It may apply to possible beings who are more than human, and are called angels, spirits, and the like, the signification is the same. It means a substance, which is above the brutes, and less than God. It is a common term enough. It is one of the earliest words that a child learns to employ with a distinct conception, and which is not that of a toy. A dog, it exclaims, is not a person, but its own mother is a person, and so is a fairy or an angel. And at the same time being unhampered by theological and anti-scientific controversies, there is many a child who hesitates as to calling

God a person. Notwithstanding the amount of fable with which a child's religious instruction is usually accompanied, he is often so much impressed in a vague way by a sense of the superiority of the invisible to anything of which he has personal experience, that he early adopts the only true doctrine, that God is not a person. He does not know what to say of Him. As long as he is let alone by his teachers, his reason acts freely, and decides that the Great Unseen whom he is taught to adore is something to which the word person cannot be reverentially applied.

58. So far, then, from excusing the determination with which the religious world of different schools condemns the non-theological world, as all but atheistic, for refusing to adopt the word 'person,' I would call upon every man and woman who desires to make any advance in explanation of the terrible mystery of our being, to begin by repudiating the notion of the personality of God, as in truth impious. If the word has no meaning at all, it must be rejected as mischievous and profane, for to use nonsensical sounds and letters written upon paper as defining the knowledge we have of God is not to be heard of. But the popular use of this word is far worse. It is a distinct assertion that

we know that the Eternal is limited in the sense in which we are limited. He is in essence like ourselves, we thus say, only bigger. Like that portion of the ocean which is lower down than the horizon, He is greater than we can discern or understand, but He has limits nevertheless. He is a species of gigantic or magnified man. In a word, He is a person, and to deny His personality is to deny that He exists at all.

59. I thus begin, by urging upon every sincerely thinking man this duty, at the very outset of our inquiries, because until he has done this, and done it thoroughly, he has no hope of understanding the nature of God, in His relation to ourselves in life, and the probability as to what He will be to us in the life to come. So long as there remains in us the shadow of an idea, that God in His essence is like ourselves in being a limited substance, so long shall we continue to apply to our duties and habits in this life certain theories which are really derived from a secret belief that in some way or other God is like ourselves. The operations of the Divinity will always seem to be something like the operations of a composite organisation, like that of a machine, or of the planetary system, in which one portion may be regarded as balancing another, and in

which we can speak of one portion as different from another. Thus we might go on speaking of God's mercy as if it were a quality different from His justice; of His pitifulness as opposed to His anger; of His eternal fore-knowledge and decrees as balanced by His regard for some moral law. Thus we should go on adoring Him without exactly knowing what we were doing; we should repeat the long-lived fictions about certain gifts being given to God by ourselves, and thus being taken from ourselves; implying that once we had possessions which were our own, and which now have become sacred and holy, in a sense in which they once were not sacred and holy.

60. Thus, indeed, the religious world does continue to add freshly distorted features to its hypothetical portrait of deity. It takes various words which may happen to be employed in the Hebrew writings, in a figurative or poetical way, and employs them as if they were literal and dogmatic definitions. And thus, in the course of many centuries, the whole body of doctrine has been worked up, and men as a rule worship an idol, and not God. Instead of advancing in their knowledge of what may be known, the orthodox Christianity of to-day is far less like the scientific truth con-

cerning God and Christ which was attained by some of the Hebrew prophets, and still more is it less than that which was attained by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

61. Such have been the consequences of a devotion to creeds and ceremonies, after the philosophical conceptions, which first gave birth to those creeds and ceremonies, had become a thing of the past. We are the bondslaves of the words our own forefathers invented, or translated for some purpose which is incomprehensible to us. The devout mind is robbed of that support which is not denied to it by the nature of things, and struggles on as best it may, in the general chaos of feeling, thought, and language which satisfies a generation that mistakes churchgoing for religion, and then flies in serious numbers to Rome for the opiate which will at least soothe the pains of thought.

62. There are many wonderful things in the Old Testament, bearing on this tendency of men in all ages. Take, for instance, the narrative of the beginning of this Universe, and the Creation of man. Let it be observed by the way, that the writer of the beginning of Genesis never utters that most false of all falsehoods, that

something can be made *out of nothing*. What, at the same time are we not entitled to wonder, was the real meaning of the writer of those early chapters, when he described in detail the method by which the newly formed innocent man and woman, learnt the *nature* of moral good and evil, and were enabled to distinguish the one from the other? That the writer had some definite and probably profound meaning, can scarcely be doubted, difficult as it is to us to ascertain what it was. Was he, or was he not expounding the principles of the Utilitarian Philosophy, as I have here set it forth in connection with the belief in the objective existence of a great first cause? He describes the Eternal as pointing out to the newly-created pair a certain tree, whose fruit would bring to every one who should eat it, the knowledge of good and evil. Did he here mean no more than the figment of a snake talking like a man, and working upon a woman's curiosity, and of a man's being led away by his wife, and of their fondness for pleasant-looking fruit?

63. Is it impossible that the writer was here expounding, in this allegory, some great truth; the truth, that is, that there is no such thing as moral good and evil, except the supreme will of God, who makes both the one and the other? According to

the book of Genesis, when the Creator placed a man and a woman in a garden, with a fondness for pleasant fruit, and told them that if they ate it they would suffer and die, while as yet they did not at all understand what suffering and death were, is it not implied that He called into existence that whole class of actions which we term moral evil? If he sent an articulate voiced animal into the garden on purpose to tell them that He, 'God,' was a liar, what did the Almighty do but cause the result, and did this serpent go and tell all this to Eve, without God's permitting him to go, that is, authorising him to go?

64. Is it not far more probable that the Semitic poet who thus began the first epic poem that the World has seen, was inculcating in an allegory the fundamental truth that all we know of God is that He is the great 'I Am,' and that all things are to be regarded as possessed of that peculiar undefinable quality which we call good or evil, according as they correspond to certain elements in His own one incomprehensible nature? How should the newly-formed man, whether by development from a lower animal, or by some such process as the book of Genesis describes, know that there is any difference between good and evil, as such?

Where did he get his conception of morality, as we get our ideas of colour through the eye, and of sound through the ear? An infant, to-day, has no such conception by nature, so far as definite acts are concerned. When we are young we feel pain and pleasure in various ways, and learn to attach certain causes, or results, to pleasures or pains. But this has nothing to do with moral good or evil. It teaches nothing concerning wrongness and rightness.

65. Yet society in most countries is only held together by the presence and power of this idea of right and wrong. If, accordingly, the narrative in Genesis has any foundation in fact, and is a just allegory or fable, what was the writer's intention but this, to teach that in the hidden, incomprehensible, essence of God, there is that which causes in man the development of a certain idea, to which the terms 'good' and 'evil' are to be applied? And, further, that the development of this idea was to be in harmony with the development of the material Universe, which was already in process. The record of the progress of the human race, as a history, and distinct from the allegory with which it is opened, is manifestly the work to which the writer of the early chapters betook himself.

66. When he actually wrote his book, the conception of good and evil had permeated the whole race, so far as he was acquainted with it. It was not agreeable to the tastes of his day to relate the tale of man's birth as a simple narrative of dry matters of fact, like the few cautious sentences with which the book of Genesis opens. Something strange and dramatic must be set forth, as the history of man's appearance, and of his possessing the extraordinary qualities in which he differed from the brutes. Nor was there any forgery or falsehood involved in such a device for communicating some intelligible and interesting truth to the people of that age. It is a grievous error to charge the old writers with forgery or deception because they entertained notions on the historical method unlike those of the rigid school among ourselves. Nobody calls Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War a forgery or false, because it puts into the mouths of many speakers, speeches which they never spoke. Nor does Macaulay's History of England shock the sensitive conscience of the nineteenth century, because he has put a good many things into it, which were the pure invention of his own brain. The method of Macaulay, like the method of Thucydides, was the method of his own time.

67. Such was the method of the writer of the first chapters of Genesis, whether or no it conveyed to the Semitic descendants of Abraham a tolerably correct, or a most incorrect idea of the acts of the Supreme Being. To some of us the picture, if taken literally, is partly horrible and partly absurd; to others, it is grand and touching, and narrates a story which was just what was to be expected concerning Him with whom we have to do. The men and women for whom the narrative was written, were an uncritical generation: to their mythological ideas of the Invisible Power whom they dreaded there was nothing shocking in His walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and in Adam's playing the coward, and laying all the blame of his misconduct upon Eve.

68. This incident by the way is eminently characteristic of a barbarous age, which treats its women as mere slaves to its own pleasures, and whose women are to be represented as far more ready than themselves to believe in supernatural possibilities. A cynical critic in truth, might hold that we have here something like a sketch of the typical man and typical woman of all ages. At any rate, when the chronicler has shut the door upon the garden of Eden and entered upon

something that professed to be more like a true narrative, he makes man very much what he is to-day, with that mysterious idea of the existence of such things as good and evil, firmly engrained in his mind; with this striking circumstance, that for the future his history would be little more than the record of the misery which men and women would inflict upon one another; and which, let it be added, is much the case at this present hour.

69. How in the next place do we account for the existence of this conception of good and evil, in all ages without some such speculations concerning the meaning of the writer in Genesis? How does man originally get at it, in each individual case? It is out of the question to attribute an historical truth to this portion of Genesis, and to the incident of the fruit, and the sudden unpleasant physical sensation in Adam and Eve, of such a nature that we can accept it as an account of the real and theological truth. Whatever are a man's ethnological and theological principles when we come to the actual work of life, whether social, political, or domestic, we cannot get on without the introduction of this notion of right and wrong. It turns up on all sides. Quite apart from the mere liking or disliking of certain actions, the

mind of every civilised person responds, each in his own way, to the same idea.

70. This idea varies, undoubtedly, in its details to a wonderful degree. Take for instance, a schoolboy's notions of what is good and honourable, and compare his theory as to what is right towards his companions with that which is right towards his masters. The notions are often absolutely contradictory: yet they exist in the same mind, side by side, and the boy never dreams of their inconsistency. The saying that there is 'honour among thieves,' is only an extreme statement of an unquestionable fact, which in its measure is the result of the absence of true love among a race of men and women, compelled to live together from generation to generation. How then, we have to ask, does this sentiment of real honour come into existence, which when once generated in the mind is something different from a mere calculation of the advantages which its adoption brings to society? It acts spontaneously, instantaneously. The violation of its dictates is accompanied with a peculiar feeling of pain and self-reproach, apart from the anticipation of any inconvenience that may follow from its violation. What, then, is the history of its birth?

71. Evidently it is this. While we have no knowledge as to what particular acts are to be thus applauded or condemned, until we are guided by the light of experience—in other words, by experiment—our nature is so constituted that it responds to the conception of duty, as such, with an instinctive and wonderful rapidity. There are minds, it is true, perhaps many, in which this power of spontaneous response seems to be wholly wanting. It is impossible to say, how many such there are in civilised nations, or in what stage of a growth from barbarism this capacity for feeling a sense of duty first emerges into life. What we are concerned with, is the fact that this instinctive response to the conception of duty does exist in the majority of civilised, and half-civilised men and women.

72. And it is through the operation of this sense that mankind, in its many ages and races and nations, comes to regard this moral quality of good and evil as necessarily attaching to the various thoughts, feelings and actions of humanity. There is found everywhere, a readiness to admit a sense of obligation towards some sort of being superior to ourselves. It even exists in the lower order of animals. The attachment of the dog to man is a consciousness of obligation and duty, however

defective may be the highest operations of the brutes in the region of pure thought. It is to the last degree difficult to decide how far our pre-conceived opinion, as to the moral good or evil of any-one particular act, is really the result of the teaching of our parents, our schoolfellows, or the ministers of religion upon whose shoulders parents usually shift the real responsibility of their children's knowledge of right and wrong.

73. Few people, especially women, are able to analyse the history of their religious beliefs, or to take note of the steps by which they came at last to a positive certainty concerning matters about which, when they were young, they were perfectly indifferent. The divergence of views in this respect between the two sexes is great, notwithstanding the extent of the hypocrisy which men and women practise towards each other. Men seldom really join in the common declaration of women, that they are horribly shocked at this or that opinion, or this or that action. With many of the clerical order, it is often difficult to tell whether their joining with women in thus professing to be 'shocked' is sheer professionalism, or is the result of the peculiar influences which give its characteristic tone to the clerical mind.

74. All that is evident is, that, especially in the middle and higher classes of English society, there exist despotic rules as to what things are right and what things are wrong, which are not identical among men, among women, and among clergymen; and when these classes mix together, it is by no means easy to ascertain exactly what are the real convictions of any one class to the others, and in truth what anybody honestly thinks about anything.

75. There is no country in the world where this species of self-deception and mutual deception is so common as it is here. In the House of Lords, when the class interests of the peerage and its connections are not involved, it is more usual to meet with a rational decision on matters of right and wrong, and theological disputes, than in the House of Commons, where the lower middle class exercises so formidable a power over the representatives of the manufacturing and other towns where dissent or clericalism is a living electoral power.

76. Accompanying all this endless variety of opinion, as to what acts are right and what are wrong, we find in every nation, class, and age, an

aptitude for accepting the idea of obligation to some superior power, in addition to that mere dread of the anger of a more powerful Being which is characteristic of savage and half-savage life. It may be described as the simple conception of obligation to a higher Being as such; or it may be that sense of obligation towards humanity, as one's equal, which is the characteristic of the religious philosophy of Comte. Whatever be the variations in its nature, it is distinguished by its being of the nature of a sense of obligation. It is somewhat more than the fear of harm or the hope of reward. Dissect it as we may, and adopt whatever origin we please, by which to decide that certain individual actions are good or evil, this peculiarity is always the same: it acknowledges a sense of obligation.

77. And thus it is that society is formed and held together, both in its secular and religious aspects. We are impelled by a consciousness of duty to observe those rules of life which we hold to be the result of the obligations of duty, whatever they may be. And these things in our inmost minds we regard as 'good' and their contradictories 'evil.' If we are satisfied of the existence of supernatural powers, whether polytheistic or

monotheistic, or whether we believe in one God only, or a multitude of deities inferior to Him, we are not affected in our instinctive recognition of this duty to those who are above us.

CHAPTER IV.

It is from our ignorance of the nature of God in His essence that the nature of right and wrong seems to change.—Advantages of re-examining the old conceptions and phraseology of our fathers. —In what sense is God the author of evil?—Universal change the law of the whole universe —The evolution of morality corresponds with the material evolution of all things. —God lives as well as simply exists.

78. THUS it is that we get over our difficulty, that God is the author of evil. From all time, and throughout the present civilised world, men differ as to what detailed acts are good and evil, while they agree as to the conception of duty towards what is discovered to be not evil but good. What is good to one is thus not good to another, and it is God who has caused it to be so. What there is in this inmost and unfathomable unity which thus causes these changes in the knowledge of different men and different ages, we have no means of knowing.

79. It is one of the unfathomable mysteries resulting from our ignorance of God, as He is in

Himself. He has made some things to be good, in the case of one person or country, or age, and another in another. We cannot get over this fact, even if we refuse to allow that in our own personal cases there is ever any growth or variation as to what is most desirable for the spiritualising of our own natures. Can any reasonable person assert that the acts which are harmless or meritorious in a child, may be the reverse in an old man? Yet God is the author of both the one and the other. It is *all* the work of God: that is, He is in some cases the author of evil, or what we call such.

80. In plain words, morality, whatever be our definition of the word, changes with different circumstances. And until we have come to see this, and to see what it involves with regard to the moral quality of the actions of mankind, we shall never obtain a satisfactory explanation of the twofold truth that the world is full of evil, and that God is the author of all things. Whatever must be the essential quality of moral evil, there must be something in it which allows its nature to change repeatedly, under the direct causation of Him, whose will is absolute, and whose unity of nature is essentially and undividedly One. When we think of 'evil' in this sense, let us bow our-

selves to the earth with a humility that no words can utter.

81. Surely, it is profitless to continue the common talk of bygone ages, some of us ranged on one side, some on the other; spending our energies in mutual misrepresentations and recriminations, which supply no strength in life, and no support in death. Misery exists, to a most awful extent everywhere. Everywhere our belief consists of truths, or guesses at truths about God, and the invisible life, and eternity, mixed up with the most reckless fiction on the same subjects in the Roman Church. Is it not better to take heart and face the whole depth of mystery, and inquire whether we are not all of us totally mistaken in some of the words we use, and some of the conceptions we attempt to frame of actual realities?

82. Is God, as a matter of fact, the identical species of Being whom we have all of us imagined or asserted Him to be? Surely we have no warrant for claiming for ourselves an exemption to that liability to error, which is involved in the very nature of our reasoning faculties. Who are we that we should go on for another generation, confident that we are unquestionably right, and that

like our fathers, we have no need to trouble ourselves to re-examine the old conceptions and the old phraseology? A truly marvellous fallacy has possessed mankind on this point from age to age. It has been imagined that it is a mark of conceit in a man, that he thought that he knew more than his fathers before him. What a transparent blunder! We know more than our precursors in this life, in which knowledge is the consequence of the addition of the acquirements of each age to those of that which went before it. For instance, are we not now habitually forgetful of the fundamental truth, that God does not merely exist, but that He lives a life of His own, as God? If controversialists would for a time drop their disputes about infallibility, and sacraments, and bishops, and Church and State, would they not see that the first question is the old question, as to the life of God Himself? God exists, but that is not all. Does He exist as a stone exists? Or does He live as well as exist? Surely He lives, as well as exists; He changes; He effects his own will; all this being without variations, and according to the law of His own nature. But that He thus lives, and that the moral life of man, as well as the structure of the Universe, is the result of this His life, is as certain as that He exists at all.

83. When I beg of my contemporaries to ask themselves, whether we and our fathers have clearly understood what we meant when we spoke about God being the author of evil, what is this but the result of our having learnt more on the matter than those who came before us? We might as well say that if our children went on filling and storing bags of gold after our death, they would become no richer than we left them at our decease. I say then, that it is not pride but humility which justifies us in endeavouring to find out whether there is not some different way of accounting for the existence of evil and suffering, which shall at once satisfy the scientific and philosophic thinker, and enable the devout to live and die with unflinching courage; at peace.

84. The inventions of what is technically termed 'orthodoxy,' it is notorious, have satisfied few, if any, of those clear and resolute minds which have sought for truth at all hazards. It is unnecessary to mention names of leaders of schools or the *doubles entendres*, for they are nothing less, with which such large numbers of serious, anxious, and cultivated Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, and Germans are making renewed efforts towards the solution of the old problems of good and evil,

of time and eternity, for they have made no advance beyond knowledge of the old world. Is the philosophy of Comte the last word that is to be spoken, to instruct man in facts, and in his destiny? Can we know nothing of God, nothing of what we must term His will, in the progress of the development of our race? Is it to be taken as an admitted truth that we have learnt nothing definite from Jesus of Nazareth concerning the growth of humanity? Is He, or is He not pre-eminently the type of the perfect man, so far as man can be perfected here? And have we acquired no additional hope of a continued personal existence of progressive advancement hereafter?

85. These are the questions which I am attempting to answer by asking the trembling doubting mind, to accept as true, some things which he has usually regarded with horror. Only, I ask him to accept at the same time the explanations which have not generally been made to accompany them, because men have shrunk from admitting the facts themselves, and have tried to gloss them over with additions which have practically denied the truths, or made any satisfactory solution of them impossible. It is useless to urge upon the sorrowful the consolations which are to

be derived from a knowledge of the supreme Divine power, so long as timid half-hearted teachers pretend to know the secrets of God, or imply in any way that He is not the master in this world. I have nothing to say to any man who alleges that the hidden source of life is not the author of all things.

86. It is to me simply preposterous to impute sin to a 'personal devil,' or to try to escape from the difficulty by pretending that though of course we do not believe in a personal devil, there is such a thing as an evil 'principle.' What is a 'principle,' I ask, apart from the existence of some actual entity? It is a mere word, and he who should try to induce me to say that there is no difficulty in believing in God, as being in conflict with an 'evil principle,' while it is shocking to think of His maintaining a 'personal devil' to lead men from evil downwards to damnation, is really only a slave to a phrase.

87. If God is to be our 'hope and strength,' we must take Him as He is; that is, as the author of what is called evil, and we must endeavour to ascertain, as far as our faculties will allow, what is

the true character of moral evil, as the result of the Divine Will.

88. And after all, there is nothing so mysterious or terrible in the truth, when once we have faced it with courage. Moral evil is that which is contrary to the will of God, and God is a being of whom I know nothing beyond what He has made known by His works. Now one of these undoubted and most incomprehensible works, is the extent of human ignorance, whose greatness defies all that human thoughts ever conceived of it. How many persons are there in the world whom God has caused to be born in total ignorance of His own nature? How many people believe in Mary as the 'Gate of Heaven'? How many believe in the Pope as infallible? How many believe in the Athanasian Creed? How many in the Koran? And what is the belief in God to which the millions of the densely crowded cities of England are necessarily born?

89. Yet all this ignorance is the result of the will of God. If not, of whose will is it the result? Of the molecules, some people will say; but if not of the molecules (which I deny as an impossibility) whence did come these awful delusions? Are

these errors mere word-mistakes? or figure miscalculations, like the Ptolemaic system of astronomy? Or are they errors which must exercise an immense influence on the happiness and goodness of mankind? Surely they are the latter. No one can pretend that it matters nothing whether or not we regard Mary, the wife of Joseph and the Mother of Jesus, as the 'Blessed Gate of Heaven.' Is the doctrine embodied in the picture over the altar in the Sistine Chapel in Rome a just allegory, or is it a hideous blasphemy? And are not human happiness and human virtue materially affected by a man's acceptance or repudiation of this doctrine? Yet the ignorance which is embodied in the hymn 'Ave Maris Stella,' and this Sistine picture, is as truly the result of the eternal foreknowledge of God, as the features of a new-born babe.

90. I repeat, then, that we shall never know anything correctly concerning our personal relation to God, until we learn that He has eternally ordained and carried into existence all these errors in all ages and times; and have discovered some sort of clue to their character in connection with Himself. We shall do nothing until, as far as reason allows, we grasp the whole state of the case without shrinking, and study some explanation

which shall be within human penetration, without daring to pierce the secrets of the Most High. We must also study and take into our very being just so much of that knowledge of God, in His essence, as we can comprehend, and no more. What is that truth about Him, which *must* be true, though we are unable to frame the feeblest conception as to how it is?

91. Of these two great doctrines one could have been made known to the civilised world only by the discoveries of more modern science. The other might have been known, and was really known, to the profound thinkers of all ages. This last, which we will take first, is the Unity, or, more strictly speaking, the Unanimity of the Godhead. The Godhead by Whom it was ordained that the doctrines of humility and forgiveness should be practically unknown to man until they were taught by the carpenter's son of Nazareth, has been from all eternity one and the same. I do not argue the truth of this doctrine, because it was never denied by anyone who believed in the existence of some hidden life of the Universe. And now, if a man does not believe in atoms, he believes in one Eternal Godhead. We all see that there is perpetual change going on about us, and therefore we

all hold that there must be either molecular motion, or some species of one Divine Life.

92. Next we take that other doctrine, in whose investigation we can acquire such a perception of the natural facts of moral good and evil, as was scarcely possible to generations long gone by, but which is really partially possible to created faculties. I do not pretend that any created faculties can ever understand these mysteries, as they lie hidden in the depths of the Eternal Unity. This mystery must be eternal. But what we can do is this: to watch the law by which the Eternal Unity unfolds Itself in life under the form of moral obligation and the development of the nature of man.

93. I hesitate more than I can say in putting forth these words—feeble and inadequate as they are—as expressing what is my most humble thought concerning God. Poor, hesitating, and trembling are my words. I can only say this, that in the Divine Nature, as it appears to me, there must exist that which in the moral and intellectual order corresponds to the physical development of the material Universe. As to the physical development itself, I do not understand it; I cannot tell when it began, I only see that it has taken

place. I do not adore it, because I adore God alone; but I regard it with that marvel and that secondary veneration which belongs to what we must describe as the method of God. And so it is in the moral order of the Universe. It has not started at once into perfect being, it is a growth and a development from that hidden Godhead, from which all things derive their glory and their beauty, their goodness and their truth.

94. If it is difficult to our reason, in its pride, to subject itself to this conception of the Eternal, this difficulty is a part of the moral mystery of a bygone time. I can only ask for a fair consideration of the doctrine from its many points of view. And it is with that mingled self-distrust and confidence, which a long life of thinking has naturally created in me, that I offer these suggestions to those who, as I do, long only for the truth, as far as our reason can understand it. We cannot escape the past circumstances, and the present peculiarities of the moral life of a man, just as we cannot undo those phenomena on which Mr. Darwin has based his doctrine of evolution. We may dopt or reject the doctrine of material evolution, as it seems to be in harmony with, or contra-

dictory to, these phenomena; but the phenomena themselves no man can deny.

95. So, also, we may adopt or reject the interpretation which I offer in respect to the alterations which have taken place in the opinions of various races and ages in regard to what things are moral, and what things are immoral. But the actual changes in the opinions about what is in harmony with the Divine Will have taken place, and can never be undone. It may be alleged that there is something in the very nature of a moral quality, as such, that it cannot be modified by any process analogous to that of material evolution, and that what is morally wrong now must have been always morally wrong. It is of the very essence of morality, it is said, that it should not be susceptible of change, and the old-fashioned saying, that when you are at Rome you should do what everybody at Rome does, is accounted by those who think thus as the very abomination of laxity and irreligion.

96. But the past cannot be abolished; and the one question is, how things came to be what they are in a world where God is supreme in every conceivable detail of life. For instance, the Book of Psalms was the production of the noblest series of

devout poets that mankind has ever known; but it was also the work of a series of polygamists. This cannot be doubted for an instant. Moreover, the Psalms have served for the devotional language of the Christian Church in all ages and in all its difficulties. At the same time the Christian Church in all its divisions, or nearly all, denounces polygamy in the most unsparing terms. These are the facts; and where is the interpretation?

97. On this latter I say nothing at present, except that I believe that the change is to be taken as one of a variety of cases in which some mysterious law of development or evolution has been in operation; and that in all those instances which we term evil, and in which it cannot be denied that God has been Supreme, this mysterious law of moral development has been adopted by Him in harmony with the Eternal Unity of His Nature. I see that He has adopted this rule in the material earth on which we live; and I presume that what He has been in material things, that also He has been in spiritual.

98. Let us take some other instance of the radical change in the opinions of religious persons. In the Lord's Prayer there is one condition, and

only one, laid down as the condition on which the repentant sinner is to be forgiven his own sins. Nothing is required except the forgiveness of injuries; which condition is related as having been expressly fulfilled by Jesus Himself on the cross, when He adds one condition, which is not specified in the Lord's Prayer—'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

99. Now here is a doctrine, as to the relation between God and man, which was practically new to the world, until it was made the foundation of the religion of Jesus: 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Where was this elementary law of all morality, as we now regard it, between the first formation of man and the appearance of Jesus Christ? With those who use the Lord's Prayer it is now put forward as the one irreversible condition on which God regards us as His children. It is not that it is simply assumed to be an excellent thing among other duties that we should forgive those who harm us. It is all that is specified. No other duty is distinctly specified, though it may be implied or referred to. Not so with forgiveness. Every man who says the Lord's Prayer, and is conscious that he does not forgive every human

being who has injured him, by these words calls upon God to withhold His mercy from Him. Say what we please, this is the fact.

100. But how has this condition in the Lord's Prayer been treated by those, who have employed it, as sincere Christians, ever since the martyrdom on Calvary? Go next Sunday into the church or chapel, which is most convenient to you, and where you will see the largest number of men and women with whose lives and talk you are acquainted. If the Lord's Prayer is to be strictly enforced in its actual terms, how many will be saved? With all but a few persons you know that it has been, to a large extent, a dead letter: a prayer repeated over and over again as if to display the amazing variations which the Christian Church exhibits in its ideas of what is right and what is wrong.

101. It is, of course, open to my readers to deny this, and to declare that the forgiveness of injuries, small as well as great, new as well as old, is a conspicuous feature in the lives of all their acquaintance, and that kindheartedness and thoughtfulness for others strike them in every house, and wheresoever they go. They can also add that they are conscious that love and mercy are con-

spicuous features in their own lives. But is this the case? In the Roman Church especially, the Lord's Prayer is uttered over and over again by the priesthood every day. Is this priesthood conspicuous for its practice of this virtue of love and forgiveness, or is it conspicuous for the very reverse?

102. Now, into what theory, as to the supremacy of the Divine Will, can we fit this contradiction between the prayers and the acts of this terrible priesthood? To deny that it is the will of the Godhead that such things should be is a thing not worthy of serious refutation. Is it not rather likely that this contrast between the teaching of Christ and the conduct of Christians, should be susceptible of some interpretation which should include it in the material development of an oak-tree, a lion in the forest, or the waters of the ocean, and all that dwell therein?

CHAPTER V.

The general doctrine of evolution.—Schopenhauer.—Necessity of a preliminary knowledge of the true facts of the history of Jesus of Nazareth.—Men in general ignorant of the nature of proof, as such.—The Romish fable concerning Jesus.—Taught exclusively by celibates.—The celibate doctrine carried to its extreme by the Jesuits.—The doctrine taught in the great picture of the Sistine Chapel.—Devotions to the Heart of Jesus, and the like.—Contrast between the Romish Mass and the actual Last Supper.

103. HERE it will naturally be expected that I should offer some such account of the personal history of Jesus of Nazareth as can be accepted as really true. Whatever be the value, or the worthlessness of the theory that there has been a continuous evolution in the moral governance of the world, analogous to that which has taken place in its material growth; we must accept the life and death of Christ as the one great stand-point in the moral evolution of man, in connection with that life of the hidden Deity, which we know must exist, if Deity lives at all. What is the nature of that life we cannot tell. We only know that God does *live*, and that in the idea of life is involved

that which, in our feeble thoughts and words, we term change.

104. How, then, does God change? We do not know, we cannot know, because we are not God. The one question we are entitled to ask is, according to what sequences does God act. In brief, what law does He observe in what He does? Do the changes in the phenomena of the universe follow such precise sequences, that we can call them cause, and effect? and if this is more than we can venture upon, is there any rule so constant and regular, that we can note and exactly describe it? This is the great work of Mr. Darwin. He describes a certain process, which was not by any means for the first time observed by him, for it is referred to by Aristotle; but he is the first who made so vast a number of observations on such a multitude of what seemed crucial instances, as to entitle him to say, I have found out the rule by which the life of the universe is carried on.

105. This doctrine has been accepted as true by the scientific world in general, some of them going to the length of asserting, that it was by this process that God made man. Others, not believing in God, hold that thus man came into existence

without any God. Others again, led by the German Schopenhauer, maintain a sort of evolutionary scheme, in which a species of abstract devil is introduced; which scheme is called pessimism. I do not in the least understand what Schopenhauer really meant; and I take the liberty of thinking, he did not mean anything, but that he mistook abstractions for substances, and words for ideas. His whole device seems to be one of those morbid growths, which serious German minds are given to produce, when they are not watched over by some Englishman or Frenchman, to ask them at every page what they mean by this or that sentence, and this or that word. It is the doctrine of evolution, or development, or transformation, or whatever it may be termed, with which alone we are concerned; which alone the scientific world, both theist and atheist, has accepted as a correct record of the change which has been going on in all things from all eternity.

106. Supposing then, or rather holding with undoubting certainty, that less than 2,000 years ago a most marvellous change took place in the evolution of the emotional and practical ideas of our race, what knowledge have we of the historical events which preceded and introduced this change?

A creed and habits of life called Christianity, had sprung into existence; mankind could never again become what it had once been. Whether this creed, with its customs and morals, was identically the same as that which was taught by its founder, is altogether a matter for separate consideration. Perhaps it had no sooner appeared than it was corrupted by its friends. That is an important part of our present inquiry. But our first consideration is, what do we know of the person who is said to have founded this new religion, whether those who came after him speedily altered that religion or not. The circumstances of his life and death, and the establishment and growth of his religion, were undeniably strange; and it is equally undeniable that clouds of mystery soon began to darken the true records of his life and teaching. From a very early date too his followers began to differ amongst themselves concerning him. Every record and tradition makes this admission. From the first, Christians might be told to love one another, but in practice they disagreed violently with one another, about Him whom they professed to obey, and from whom they learnt that prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses,' which they have continued incessantly to repeat, and very seldom to practise until this very hour.

107. What then do we *know* of Jesus Christ? Up to the present time we have been asking ourselves only what it is possible to know of God, and not precisely what we do know of Him. I need not remind the thoughtful reader that these questions must be kept distinct, if the mind is to be at all really satisfied in an inquiry such as that we have undertaken. It is useless to do as most people do in abstruse and difficult questions, when by mixing up the clear with the confused they produce a hazy sort of satisfaction, which lulls the thoughts, but does not lead them to a legitimate repose. A course of reasoning is like a chain of metallic links, it is exactly as strong as its weakest point, and no stronger; but in religious thought the nearly universal practice is to fix the attention on what may seem to be the strongest portions of one's own belief, and upon the weakest of that of our adversaries.

108. Nothing can in truth be more misleading than the system adopted by very many who are thought extremely religious. They mistake earnestness for a zeal for what is true; while what they are earnest about is their own personal imagination on any one subject in dispute. They dislike being agitated, or to lose the daily or weekly supply of

sweet thoughts to which they have accustomed themselves. Or, at the utmost, they ask only for what is negatively, and not alone for what is positively true. They have been led to take up with some creed, from that of Rome downwards, and it is enough for them that it satisfies their spiritual needs, as they say: which is very much the same as if a person who was sick with a dangerous complaint should go into a chemist's shop, and satisfy himself with a series of doses of the medicine that should be most agreeable to his palate. They are very anxious about their souls, so they say; but they are very easy to satisfy about them. They want to have their difficulties put an end to, and that is all.

109. With such people I have nothing to do. They do not want to know what is true about Christ; they want to know whether a plausible self-consistent narrative can be made up about Him; they do not care what difficulties in the matter of preliminary reasoning have to be got over before they can rationally enter upon the subject at all. Like nearly all the rest of mankind, they do not know what *proof* is, and therefore they are not much distressed when they are told that they have no real proof at all, for the belief with which

they are prepared to enter on eternity. They have not of course the perfect repose and peace which is given to the few who will give all they have in the world for the truth, whatever that truth may be. Such joy as this was never theirs.

110. The real peace indeed, which many so-called devout persons attain to, is in truth a most singular thing. In the ordinary course of life it is not really the peace which comes from knowledge at all; it is a form of nervous emotion, and depends for its continuance on all the apparatus of books, clergymen, services, friends, and tolerably good health—though it is perhaps stimulated by a slight measure of depression or illness, such as may quiet the intrusive energies of a too vigorous *physique*. But it is not that repose of the entire man, both intellectual and emotional, which springs from positive unanswerable knowledge of mental, historical, and personal truth.

111. It is especially rare among Roman Catholics, who are naturally born in the same relative proportions of truth-lovers and comfort-lovers as are Protestants, but who are brought up to hold one of the most detestable notions that it ever entered the heart of man to conceive—the notion that it is a

deadly offence against God to examine seriously and with any doubting whether the Roman system may not after all be a mistake. That minds thus weighed down in the mire of self-satisfaction and slavery should ever dare to break through their chains is a rare thing. Still, it does occur, though seldom, because few people, and especially the servants of Rome, care for truth. God, in the hidden mystery of His wisdom, has so constituted men that they do not care for what is true, but for what is pleasant. And thus it is that in every age they have loved the ready-made idol rather than God Himself.

112. What is the character of the various species of idolatry, which has still so many adherents all over the world, we need not at present inquire. Our duty, speaking argumentatively, is to look around and note the outline of the current opinions concerning Jesus of Nazareth before further proceeding. This will be most satisfactorily done by examining briefly the fable which Rome has for century after century been gathering together around that holy figure; and what it is that the world has learnt to believe in the place of the old worship of Saturn, of Jupiter, of Juno, and Minerva. This is the conception of the one true God, and of

His relation towards us, which has now found so many admirers among English men and English women, and especially English clergymen, who are compassing sea and land to make one proselyte.

113. It will be easier to approach the figure of the true Christ and His religion, when we have brought distinctly before us that living reality, which Rome tells us is infallibly known to her through the direct influence of God Himself. We shall thus have before us, with full distinctness, the nature of the alternative which is presented to the religious and honest mind; for the Roman is only a repetition of the Greek and Russian forms of Christianity: and Greece and Rome together outnumber beyond measure all variations of Protestant Christianity, which themselves are numerous, and are distinguished by strongly marked lines of belief and practice. Rome, too, is the most powerful of existing forms of Christianity; and she alone professedly offers to the sincere and truth-loving mind that perfect intellectual and moral repose towards which I am endeavouring to lead the resolute, and courageous, and humble thinker. Of those who think with most resolution and sincerity the large majority hesitate, I believe, between the conviction that nothing is to be attained that can

be called real knowledge, and submission to Rome. In these are comprised nearly all, if not quite all, who are not contented to take their religion just as it comes to them, and who think that the best thing a wise and good man can do is to leave all such difficulties just as they were handed to him from his forefathers.

114. These are the two great phenomena which seize on the attention of those who desire to conclude their lives at rest in respect to God and eternity. The figure of Christ appears to us in the dim distance of history nearly 2,000 years ago; and all over the world there is only one mighty organisation which puts forth a claim to possess that certain knowledge concerning Him which will satisfy our desires. And this is how she presents herself to our obedience. Everywhere she begins by the adoption of a notion concerning God which is in direct contradiction to the undoubted method which He has adopted throughout the living material world. The whole Roman teaching concerning Christ is in the hands of men and women who are bound to the practice of celibacy as the noblest life to which men and women can aspire. There are, it is true, a very small number of married clergy in the Græco-Roman Church; but

they are despised, they cannot be made bishops, and they count for nothing in the organisation of the vast Roman Church throughout the world.

115. Everywhere in reality Rome enforces celibacy as a nobler and purer thing than marriage; as a mode of life which assimilates the human to the divine nature; and as the especial feature of the religion of Jesus. It stigmatises the ordinary life, even of its own followers, as 'the world,' and describes women who take a vow to live together without husbands as 'the religious.' The entire practical Roman system is leavened through and through with this notion, which was originally taken from one of the ancient theories about God. All things connected with matter were, according to this Eastern religion, evil; and the pure spirit of God, and the wicked material power of matter, were eternally at conflict; and of course it was in rigid celibacy that the good divinity was to win his most triumphant victory over evil.

116. '*Naturam expellas furcâ, tamen usque recurret.*' As years and centuries went by, and the power of the Pope grew more and more absolute, it was found expedient to tighten this holy discipline of celibacy closer and closer, and the small

liberty of marriage here and there allowed to parish or other priests was withdrawn; while the members of the orders specially dignified 'as religious,' were constantly increased. It was found by Rome, that the tighter the chain of celibacy was drawn, the more ready was the acquiescence of the priesthood in the dictates of the papacy, and the new device became more and more frequently adopted.

117. The celibacy of the clergy was a mere matter of rule. The Pope could at any time abolish it, as he might abolish it now. But it answered his purpose to consecrate this system of life with more and more of his 'blessings;' and to grant it more and more of that wonderful invention called 'indulgences.' The poor parish priest therefore, who was merely ordered not to take a wife, was half set aside by the members of societies, who took personal vows that they would never marry; and were immediately hailed by their admirers as saints, and were found moreover to be peculiarly obedient to the Papacy as its instruments, for the carrying out its conflicts with the laity. At last, after the Reformation, arose Ignatius Loyola, under whose acute, fanatical, cruel, and martial guidance was founded the society which took the name of Jesus, and now carry to an extreme the

final abolition of every trace of the marriage contract, by rooting out from the heart every remnant of family affection. With Loyola, Xavier, and the rest of the early Jesuits, the method adopted by God for the perpetuation of all living things from men downwards, was finally swept away by the pretended followers of the carpenter's son.

118. It is impossible in a book intended for general reading, to state in any detail the morbid growths, the utterly diseased imaginations, which have sprung from this canonising of the state of celibacy. At present it is only necessary to suggest to the unenlightened Protestant scholar that he should ask any tolerably honest Roman Catholic priest, who has learnt his theology, a thing by no means universal among the priesthood, what is the whole meaning of the first stanza of the popular hymn, 'Ave Maris stella.' He will then perhaps learn a little more of that virginity which he hears so glibly talked about, in Roman Catholic pulpits, and is made so much of in Roman Catholic books of devotion, which themselves are made the subjects of imitation by Anglican clergymen in increasing numbers. I need do no more in passing, than repeat what I have just said, that this worship is in direct contradiction to the method of evolu-

tion or development which undoubtedly God has Himself consecrated, by its use throughout the material world.

119. That which is kept incessantly before us by Rome, is the scheme of life which man, and not God, has consecrated. Beginning with the condemnation of marriage as an inferior state, Rome appears to the inquirer to have discovered very soon that there was no place for her system in the moral evolution of mankind. Jesus was a man. Rome, unmarried, sought for a goddess, as the object of her supreme worship. Whatever was to be made of the dogmatic instruction which was first traditional, and then partially written among the followers of Jesus, the practically supreme power must be placed in the hands of one of the other sex. Human nature was too strong for theorists. Man denied a wife, must betake himself to a goddess; and woman forbidden to entertain human love must embrace the man Jesus, as 'her spouse.'

120. Searching thus everywhere for the words of the infallible oracle that shall tell us the truth and nothing but the truth concerning Jesus of Nazareth, we approach the 'footstool of the Apostles,' and are anxious to learn in what manner

Jesus, 'the teacher,' as they say 'of love,' and 'the man of sorrows,' is represented in the chapel which is the peculiar possession belonging to the Pope, our infallible teacher. Over the altar where this Vicar of Christ' offers his devotions to the God with whom he declares that he is especially privileged to communicate, is an enormous picture, in which Christ Himself is represented, winding up the affairs of humanity, and fixing for everyone his eternal destiny.

121. The first feature that strikes us is this, that almost everybody that is not going down to eternal torments, was unmarried while he or she lived. Heaven is the home of the celibates: popes and cardinals, abbots and friars, priests and nuns, with a few of the laity, these are the personages who are the peculiar representatives of the religion of Jesus Christ, and who will enjoy the happiness which is denied to the vast majority of mankind.

122. But who is the judge who is apportioning to each saint, or sinner, his reward? Who is it, that represents the spirit of that religion, and that morality which undoubtedly characterises the New Testament, whatever may be our criticisms on its various portions, and our idea of the dogmas pecu-

liar to Christianity. Who sits there the embodiment of the Athanasian Creed? Who is that whom we are taught to approach, with undoubting certainty, and joyful hearts, by those who are foremost in telling us that the 'eternal life' is a 'person'? Is it not a fierce and angry-looking man, with passion upon his countenance and uplifted arm, driving down the myriads of the damned, away from the presence of the Eternal God who created them? And is not His name that which was written by Pilate upon the cross, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews?' This is He, the poor carpenter's son, who taught every one who would hear Him to say, 'Our Father,' to the Lord of Earth and Heaven.

123. And who is the true intercessor before the Father, and before the angry Jesus Himself? It is a woman. It is the woman whom he obeyed when He was alive, and whom Rome says that He obeys now in His eternal rest. This is the true papal divinity. This is the goddess who is the 'gate of Heaven.' This is she, who is *semper virgo*, who bestows mercy on all who call upon *her*. This is in truth the glorification of the animal portion of human nature. For in choosing out one half of the complete man, that without which man

is not man, but a stone, or a drop of water, the absolute predominant importance of the animal element is proclaimed, and the true representative of the Eternal is one in whom sex is the supreme idea. The first consideration in the development of the perfect human being, is whether he has devoted himself to celibacy, in order to receive at the last day, the crown of glory, from a woman.

124. Thus the religion of Jesus appears to the multitude around us as the religion of a woman. If the mercy of God is free, it is dispensed by the wife of a Jewish carpenter, whose body, as well as her soul, was taken up into Heaven from this earth soon after she died. It is all a bewilderment to us at this stage of our inquiry, but so far it seems to be self-consistent; and the contrast between what is written in the Gospels about Jesus and the actual practice of all Roman and Greek Christians is as great as that between noontide and midnight. Before, however, advancing to ask how the celibate multitude of men and women carry out for their own and other persons' benefit the religion of the Lord's Prayer, a few astonishing details strike our eyes.

125. Whatever may be said or done it is plain

that though the idea of marriage is denounced in innumerable words and practices, it is so deeply ingrained by God in human nature that the wildest madness of asceticism cannot thoroughly root it out. The imagination thoroughly diseased through fasting and unrefined meditations invents a class of devotions which I hesitate to call by their true name. These half-spiritual, half-animal recollections and fancies fasten themselves upon certain portions of the body of Jesus or His Mother. The heart of Christ, or the wound in His side, or the bloody openings in His hands and feet, are taken one by one, and submitted to a kind of anatomical examination, based on a gross physical misrepresentation. All that is really wanted is blood, flowing from one spot or another.

126. The dead Jesus is indeed said to have actually displayed His body to a frantic nun, calling her attention to His heart and bidding her pay extraordinary devotion to its bloody ventricles, and to teach others to do the same. The poor diseased woman is of course what they call a most chaste virgin. This is part of her malady; and in this imaginary Christ she finds the self-sacrificing much-loving man whom her soul longs for. Rome hails the miracle with rapture; indulgences pour

upon the devotees in showers; and the Holy Babe of Bethlehem and His tender innocent Mother are turned into a nauseous idol.

127. In addition to this work of the women, the male celibates invent and cultivate all species of fondnesses for the pious wife of Joseph, until we hardly know which variety of 'Mary, the Mother of God,' is the especial favourite of priests, and also of soldiers whenever they have the rare quality of being pious. At any rate, it is the monk, or friar, or 'religious,' in whom Mary's eyes glisten with such loving sweetness. The Romish world swarms with favourite shrines, from Loretto downwards.

128. This virgin is also perpetually appearing in different places in some beautiful costume and crowned with glory, and the marvels which always follow her appearance are interminable. The heart of the devotee thus still has its female consoler, and people in authority hasten to place the town or institution 'under the protection of Mary.' Another singular custom prevails in private families, especially those of the better classes. Married people endeavour to anticipate the machinations of the Devil and of Protestants by devoting their

babies to Mary from their birth; and in good society one not unfrequently sees a little girl or boy dressed always in blue and white, because it is a 'vouée' or a 'voué' to Mary.

129. Proceeding from the teachers to the subject of their teaching, we look around to learn what it is that infallible Rome is, as she tells us, instructed by God to teach the world in respect to Him who, when He died on Calvary, left the Lord's Prayer as the embodiment of His teaching of the relation of God to man. Everywhere in Protestant countries is scattered broadcast a book which professes to describe the preaching of Jesus, and to contain several letters written to His followers who had settled in communities in the more frequented parts of the old Roman Empire. The same book is also regarded by the Roman priests and nuns, and by such of the laity as possess it, as having been written under the direction of God, and to give a perfectly true account of the life and death of Jesus. Let us observe how the practice of these tens of thousands of bishops, priests, and nuns, is made to fit in with the picture of the life of Jesus which these old narratives and letters supply.

130. One duty we learn is taught far above all

others, as especially adapted to carry out His instructions, and make His followers like Him. In the narratives of His life, an affecting scene of leave-taking is recorded, between Jesus and His chief followers. His mother, it is to be observed, is not there on this occasion, at least no mention is made of her presence in any of the narratives. What takes place is, in itself, an ordinary evening meal, in which one of the narratives tells us how the master washes the disciples' feet, using a common Eastern custom, as a symbol of that universal love and humility which was the very essence of His religion. They also eat bread, and drink wine, the Master warning His disciples that there was a traitor among them; and again employing the Eastern symbol of sharing a meal together, to be the pledge of mutual love and brotherhood.

131. Reading in these narratives, some phrases which plainly imply that the practice of supping together was to be continued, as a token of this brotherhood, we are anxious to see how the celibate priesthood of Rome fulfil their Master's injunctions; and the first rule which we find that they enforce, is, that the Lord's Supper, as it came to be appropriately called, was never to be celebrated after twelve o'clock in the day. When in-

deed a person is dying, a piece of bread, or a wafer, is taken to him and called Jesus. There is at the same time no pretence at any supper, for no other person except the sick man eats any of the bread, before which all the persons present kneel down and worship. And altogether, instead of doing anything to keep up the recollection of a supper as such, the whole idea is obliterated.

132. Rome absolutely forbids anything to be done which bears the slightest resemblance to any sort of meal. Circular pieces of bread, without any wine, are placed in the mouth of one or more persons, some wine being drunk by the officiating priest alone. Very often, the whole ceremonial is remarkably splendid, accompanied with a vast amount of music and singing, and the burning of incense ; costing large sums of money, and utterly obliterating all recollections of the actual supper which Jesus shared with His apostles.

133. At the same time, that old idea that there is something evil in matter as such, is kept up by the rule that no one who receives the wafer, nor the priest who takes the wine as well as the wafer, shall touch a particle of any sort of food or liquid after midnight before receiving. Nevertheless im-

mediately after receiving, they may eat and drink as much as they please. The minister, or priest, who repeats the words which are supposed to turn each piece of bread into God, so thoroughly that every fragment of it becomes God completely in itself, must not touch even one drop of water, after midnight, before eating the bread, and drinking the wine; while he may eat and drink what he chooses immediately before midnight, and he may begin the ceremony directly after midnight, and he may smoke as much as he pleases at any time.

134. Such is the method by which the uncounted millions of Roman and Greek Christendom keep up the memory of the life and death of Him by whose name they call themselves, and to whom a large portion of the civilised world look, as the most perfect example to whom we can look when we would prepare ourselves to die with joyful hope of a coming life better than this present one. Such, in a word, is Jesus as presented to us by the Papacy.

135. I ask, then, will this presentation of the true God, and of Jesus of Nazareth, bear a moment's serious consideration, and satisfy the mind which thinks as well as trembles? On the

contrary, it follows that there has been no moral development of the Divine relations towards us in our past history. Christ is no more to us than was Baal, or Jupiter, or the demonology of the dark ages. Whether the Roman organisation and creed are true or false, as a continuation of the religion of Jesus Christ they are simply an imposture.

136. If, then, in conclusion, a development of morality is really a part of the Divine government of humanity, we must seek elsewhere than in Rome for our actual knowledge of the person of Jesus, and for our interpretation of His position in the evolution of human perfection from the hidden, unchanged, eternal, divine unity. That He does hold such a place in that evolution, which was held by no one before Him, and which has been held by none other since Him, is my humble conviction, and further, I am satisfied that in arriving at the perception of this position, we are enabled to get rid in some degree of the old horror, of the notion that God is the author of all evil.

CHAPTER VI.

The worship of idols not inconsistent with moral goodness.—Early growths of idolatry.—The New Testament.—Morality not the same in all ages.—It is really the unfolding of the hidden life of the Eternal 'I Am.'

137. SUCH, then, is Jesus of Nazareth, as He is presented to us by the Church of Rome. Such a being cannot be one to whom the mind can go for any enlightenment as to the nature and will of the unseen God. Nor can any suggestions be learnt from Him to strengthen and comfort the struggling soul in this dark and weary life. Let us not delude ourselves, by any illusions created by Rome, as she presents herself to the Protestant spectator. In reality she is not even what she professes to be; she is practically the worshipper of a woman, and her aim is to convert man into the slave of sex, with a morsel of bread for his God.

138. No quibble can alter the fact, a wafer *cannot* be a God, it cannot be one of the demi-gods of the heathen mythology. Let us not be blinded by

the fear of uncharitableness towards the many good and able men who hold the dogma of transubstantiation, and trust to Mary as the 'gate of Heaven.' A piece of bread is an idol, with whatever ceremonies and words it is consecrated. Let us not be afraid of calling good men idolaters. A very good man may be an idolater, and may believe in Mary the mother of Jesus, just as many good men believed in Minerva and Diana, and as they now worship and offer incense to the sun.

139. This is part of the tremendous mystery of 'evil,' that the true God keeps back all knowledge of Himself from so many of His creatures, and allows them, however excellent their intentions, to imagine that the universe is filled with idols of all descriptions. Some are not without grandeur and beauty, like the classic deities, with a tendency to hideousness, as in Asia. The African idolaters are on the whole more revolting. On the other hand every sort of approximation seems to have been made by the natives of ancient North America, towards a conception of the unity of God, and a life after death, which would be a practical continuation of this present life. Egypt, the Druidical races, the races of Asia Minor, every country has had its own idols in sufficient number and

variety, Buddhism above all making some apparent approach to the truth. All this is an integral element in the more early evolution of the eternal unity of the Godhead.

140. We cannot tell why it is so. All we can tell is, that myriads and myriads of ages ago, as soon as man made his appearance upon earth, evolved by some process or other, through the active will of Him who from all eternity has preordained all things, man has invented some inferior or local God of his own. He did not worship the deity of his own imagination as the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth. Man had never conceived of such a being, even as we now conceive him. And this is a consideration of the utmost moment. In the elder ages, when nations now 'civilised' worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses, no one had yet shown them anything better. It is so now. The low-typed races of Australia and Africa adore pieces of stick, or carved stone, and mutter many sentences of consecration, but they know no better. There are millions in Great Britain whose conceptions of the true God are but little better than those of these blacks and their medicine men.

141. We cannot explain all this. All we know

is that, by some slow process of evolution, human societies, lay and clerical, have come to hold certain conceptions of the Eternal God and of mortality which are different from those of the Australian and African blacks. But what is there to choose between the God that is worshipped by the English missionary, and the idol of the dark-skinned savage whom he goes to teach? I do not attempt to draw the contrast. All we have to do with, is the awful extent to which a deity is worshipped by the comfortable classes in England, who is no more like the Eternal Source of all light, than is the goddess who is practically supreme in the religion of Rome.

142. In the meantime, amidst the storms of controversies and the mutual hatreds with which Christian communities denounce one another, this one book lies silent upon our shelves. A strange name has been given to it—as arbitrary a title as was ever bestowed on any miscellaneous collection of writings. It is termed the New Testament. What, then, is the New Testament? Let us quiet the agitation that begins to arise in many breasts at the very question. We know the storms that rise at such questions as these; we know that a fierce tempest sometimes shakes well-intentioned

and cultivated breasts at the bare question, 'What is the New Testament?'

143. Yet in the answer to this question is our only hope of any satisfactory reply to the main question of my little book. With death before us, and possibly at hand in a day or two; with all the peace of our life dependent upon the repose and love with which we can contemplate the life, the words, and the death of Jesus; surely it is worth while to devote some—nay, many—anxious hours to facing those serious thoughts which we must encounter if we would find any satisfactory reply to the question, 'What is the New Testament?'

144. Only for those who are thus prepared am I making my humble attempt. I am not thinking of placing the state of the case before the crowd of well-meaning persons who only want quiet at any cost. Quiet is to be obtained anywhere. There are spiritual anodynes to be obtained in all kinds of religious books, or in any pulpit, and from thousands of clergymen. In death, if a man or woman only desires not to be disturbed in his or her religious comfort, I do not see why he or she should not call in the nearest or most popular

Roman Catholic priest. They have all of them got up one side of the question with tolerable skill. At any rate they can do as the general medical practitioner does who calls in a physician in any difficult case.

145. For it is in mental as in bodily disease. There are well-approved spiritual doctors who know thoroughly the nature of all spiritual complaints, male and female, and can administer the appropriate remedy. There is only one strange perversity (which they call wickedness) in the Protestant mind for which they have no cure. They are lost when the soul cares for nothing but the truth as such, and repudiates every pretended solution of a difficulty which it does not itself see to be a solution. For this Roman teaching there is unquestionably much to be said, which is not to be found in the common Protestant teaching, if only the thinker has not the courage to face, not only 'the truth, and nothing but the truth,' but also 'the whole truth.'

146. This one great truth which is the key to the whole mystery, so far as our reason can now understand it, is this: that morality is not the same in all ages. In other words, what is right in

one case is not necessarily right in another. This arises from the fact that the Eternal Unity is always acting according to the hidden but essential nature of that Unity. Further, not being God ourselves, we cannot form the feeblest conception of the *mode* in which the divine Unity causes this incessant evolution, which is both material and spiritual. We can only humbly, patiently, and joyfully study the process of this development, through which it follows that all things are 'good' or 'evil' exactly as they are in conformity with this evolution; and, in truth, the words good and evil are convenient forms for saying that the Eternal Unity is unfolding Itself thus or thus; that misery is in some incomprehensible manner bound up with this good or evil; that all this is the effect of the life that God lives, so far as He makes it known to us. Before that majestic incomprehensible life I prostrate myself in happy adoration, and in my heart I associate myself with the uncounted myriads who everywhere live their life in harmony with the Eternal Life, in the conscious employment and evolution of their whole faculties, as I trust that I myself shall be occupied for ever.

147. As to the exact period of time that elapsed

from the first appearance of man upon the earth until the birth of Jesus, we know nothing of it, even as concerns the change from 'the beginning' until our own history, as it commences in Genesis. The geological records of our earth assure us that there was this beginning of our own history, and of the earth and planetary system in which we are placed. We *know* that there has been a change from geological facts as certainly as we know the laws of geometry, though not by the same theoretical method. It has not always been as it is now. Within actual history, though not a history written in hieroglyphics or on paper, changes have taken place on our earth, as well as in man's appearance and history, affecting his entire moral and intellectual being.

148. The fact of moral and intellectual change, lasting through periods of time which it is vain to attempt to count, is thus to be taken as a fact absolutely undeniable. When it seems, therefore, that all this moral and intellectual change has followed some exact and never-varying law, instead of being bewildered, we should rather recognise our own foolishness in expecting to find an explanation of the ways of the Eternal in any sort of fable that comes to our hands, and in being satisfied in

imagining that this was the way that evil came into existence amongst us.

149. It was easy enough, too, to condemn and persecute every one whose theory was not ours, and whose fables were not our fables. We all of us have seen in life, especially in religious inquiries, that the art of cursing is the easiest and safest to follow. If a man can do nothing else he can curse, and if a woman is less boisterous and coarse in her cursing than a man, she can be much more bitter. She may not like the sight of blood so much as a man, but she can watch the slow moans of agony with a calm countenance, and turn to her own devotions with a more satisfied smile while she reflects that some enemy or heretic is at last unquestionably expiring upon the wheel.

CHAPTER VII.

Standpoint from which we review the history of humanity.—Preparations of past ages for the coming of Jesus to take the chief part in the Evolution of human life.—Passions natural to aboriginal man.—First growth of love and friendship.—Growth of belief in the Unseen, whether Monotheist or Polytheist.—Unconsciousness on man's part of the changes around him and within him.—Sense of awe before the Divine Majesty ever present in the devout heart.—Exultation of the humble mind in associating its own life with the evolution of the Life of God.

150. AND so for myriads and myriads of years our race in its infancy has been struggling through the first elements of civilisation, deciding on its social, political, and military morals, and inventing its superstitions about the unseen powers of the air. And precisely as man's knowledge has grown, as he has learnt his own nature, by his experience of the operation of his faculties and inclinations, the laws of morality have been evolved. In strict language, what has passed has been the life of God—the never-dying process by which the Eternal undivided One has lived according to His nature, which says concerning Itself, 'I am, that I am.'

151. That life is boundless in its complexity, though one in its essence, and to us that complexity is bewildering, and even terrible, because we cannot comprehend it in its essence. Its moral and its intellectual complexities are necessarily as bewildering as its material; but dreadful as they may seem, it is as certain to us that our conceptions of morality are not those of a man in his primitive state, as that the flowers, the trees, and the animals of to-day are not those of the glacial period. All is changed. The glacial age is gone; so is the stone and the iron age of man; and we of to-day have acquired ideas of right and wrong, and of the nature of the true God, not the same as those of the first savages who trod the wilds of the earth.

152. But why should we wonder at one more than the other, or be terrified at the thought of one being the work of the Unseen Divinity, and not at the thought that He is also the Author of the other? Both alike, I ask the pious and enlightened mind to reflect, are the work of one God. We cannot with strict reason see God in all material things, and worship Him as 'immanent' in nature, and then, in all the domain of morals, attempt to stifle the questionings of reason by the administration of a powerful narcotic, in the shape

of allegories, or fables, or articles drawn up by popes, or princes, or general councils.

153. There is but one course of reasoning open to us, which is, to correct the errors in our phraseology, and clear our minds of clouds, and avow our belief that the words moral good and evil are technical, and that all things are by the will of God. There is nothing new in what I say, except this, that I write with the advantage of the accumulated knowledge of many generations, since the mighty Greeks and the mighty philosophical theologians of the middle ages, such as Aquinas, taught what they knew. In the eyes of the ancients the world was a few thousand years old, and the firmament was made in six days. We know now that myriads and myriads of ages passed between the time when 'the earth was without form and void' and the day when the first man stood upon the fields. We therefore can approach the subject of the origin of good and evil from a point of view far different from that of the Jews after the return from the Captivity, or of Paul, the Pharisee of Tarsus.

154. Thus with calm, and more courageous feelings, we are prepared for studying the doctrine

that our ideas of moral good and evil are the result of the evolution of millions upon millions of years. Our minds have grown so habituated to these enormous periods of geological change, that we can think over the slow modifications by which actions change their complexion with a philosophical quiet unknown to our forefathers. The reader, I do not doubt, will after a time acquiesce in my proposition that the qualities of good and evil are akin to the sensations of pleasure and pain. They result from the hidden mystery of the Divine Nature, and are the effect of the Divine Life unfolding itself in the human, like all joy and suffering, and like the evolution of the whole material universe.

155. How, in the next place, has the moral and intellectual nature of man been developed, so far as it has been developed in the existing age of the world? We can trace the method of evolution in material things so closely as to be able to decide that, though we know nothing as to what life is, we can say that it has thus and thus been carried onwards. If a similar law has governed the life of our race, as a whole, in its personal and social aspects, can we not specify the leading facts of that law, and show how it is that the process has been

carried on, which admitted of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth as the one figure in whose presence the light of all other teachers grows pale?

156. There is no doubt that man in his savage state, and in the earlier stages of his civilisation, is governed almost solely by his anger, hatred, and revenge, and by his more purely animal desires. Whether or not his hatred, cruelty, and pride gain in intensity through the increase in nervous sensibility which follows upon his escape from the more purely brutal character of his earlier state, it is impossible to say. It is curious to remark, in that which is probably the earliest story of passion in existence, the story of Cain and Abel, that wounded pride combines with bloodthirstiness to give its type to the first crime on record.

157. The actual age of the narrative of Genesis is, doubtless, beyond the scope of historical inquiries. But even supposing that in its present details it is not older than the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity, it shows us plainly what the Jews of that date conceived to be the morality natural to man when first created. Strip the story in Genesis of the pictures added in the Middle Ages, in the Renaissance period, and our

own *Paradise Lost*, and what does the bare narrative of Genesis become?

158. And so it is in every record which cave, or tomb, or lake, or carved implement has preserved to us of the lives of our first ancestors. It is the record of a life of animal passion, guided by the first desires of budding intelligence, together with—and let this never be forgotten—a few faint tokens of the existence of that fondness for ornament which ultimately became the passion for art and beauty. The glories of the Parthenon are foreshadowed in the relics of the first implements invented by man for the gratification of his desires.

159. After a while signs are to be observed of new passions and habits. It is clear that men and women could not live together, in any sort of association, without discovering that self-control of some sort must be exercised, and that men individually must band themselves together for the benefit of the individual. The law of evolution compels the creation of certain rules and punishments, and with these rules and punishments for the benefit of the weak arise the first germs of the emotions that may be called love, and friendship, and self-denial in its faintest beginnings.

160. Even now gratitude is one of the rarest of feelings. We love those whom we help more than those who help us, and love in its more tender forms did not spring up from the weak towards the strong in return for service and protection rendered. It was the strong who protected the weak in this carrying into the framework of the earliest society that love, as distinct from the simplest animal passion, which was thus developed in human nature. Men loved women, with all the elements of true love, before women loved men. The genesis of morals, including the order in which the varieties of emotions obtain their predominance in the individual and in the State, must always remain a matter of great obscurity. But we may safely assume that the emotional and intellectual elements always bore to one another much the same relation as they bear to-day; and that from the first it was the benefactor who was more inclined to transmute his mere good-will into love, than the man or woman who received the kindnesses was disposed to repay them with affectionate gratitude.

161. Everywhere, there can be no reasonable doubt, the newly-formed race changed its character in conjunction with the various institutions which sprang up as humanity spread itself all over the

world; and it is vain to attempt to draw up any theory which shall show us in what order each element worked. Man was always what he is now, though with a brain undeveloped and unrefined. The appetites in general; the more tender emotions; the sense of duty, as duty; the vague but real admiration for self-sacrifice; the love of art, in gradually expanding conceptions; all united or struggled by degrees to alter the original man, and to rebuild the foundations of the social structure in which he lived.

162. And everywhere there has existed the same tendency to regard the race of men as in some way related to an invisible power, usually of a low polytheistic type, but in one case at a period which must be regarded as unquestionably prehistoric, monotheist. Whatever may be the strictly historical value of the early records of the Jews, it were sheer childishness to doubt that at a period still legendary a belief in the existence of one God had arisen in a branch of the Semitic race. And in this case, as in all others, the belief in the presence of this true God, and His participation in all the minutest affairs of men, and in His 'immanence' in nature, was in the highest degree vigorous and unchanging.

163. Admitting everything that can be admitted as to the legendary or poetic character of much of the Old Testament, and of the influence of the Babylonish Captivity upon its records, we may as well deny the existence of Julius Cæsar as the reality of the monotheistic history of the Jews from a period which cannot now be fixed. No man in his senses can doubt the existence of David and Solomon, or imagine that none of the Psalms were the writing of David, and that we have probably the literal words which he wrote. That we have probably some of the melodies to which his Psalms were sung is a probability which cannot be pressed upon the non-musical reader, who is not familiar with the curiosities of antique and Oriental scales. One thing may be taken for granted. The writers of the Psalms knew no more of the mawkish or flippant modern hymn tune than they knew of the Pagan creeds which are often embodied in those hymns themselves.

164. So with all other trustworthy records that remain to us of any other Oriental, or African, or Egyptian progress in civilisation. Everywhere we observe signs of the 'survival of the strongest.' Everywhere is conflict; everywhere victory; everywhere there is change from one stage to another.

drawn from the barbarians, who frequented the banks of the Seine, when men with their animal passions, and tendency to hatred and to love, were first striving with one another.

167. So far as we know anything whatever of the emotional, physical, and intellectual nature of our species, it was in substance the same as it is now. Every year some kinds of modifications have taken place in our ideas, habits, and laws, the result of what is going on amongst us. And this is the one chief characteristic of the growth of ideas of right and wrong, that it is for the most part unconscious. No one foresees what will be the final consequence of any of his own actions, either to himself, to his contemporaries, or to the coming generation. Insensibly customs arise, and habits are formed, which bring each coming age to feel that the acts which were formerly condemned or praised had not exactly those effects which were expected from them. What were supposed to be laws of rigid enactment, are discovered to be less strict in their demands. The young, ever bold, self-satisfied, and ignorant of what passes in the thoughts and affections of their elders, thrust aside what has hitherto been thought venerable; until

at last the ideas of good and evil have changed sides, and it is thought that what the Unseen Power once commanded, he now actually condemns.

168. It was the same, so far as we can arrive at any certain conclusions, as to the 'survival of the strongest,' in all variations of civilised race, up to the time of the birth of Jesus. In Buddhism, in Judaism, in Platonism, and in the morality of the Greek tragedians, the differences of the fundamental ideas are not very profound. In each one is to be found some special approximation towards the truths at last to appear in the teaching, the life, and the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Each race is affected by the changing of circumstances and seems to be moved by some hidden power, which was in itself the Life which the Eternal Unity was living, according to the essence of its own nature, before the very thought of which the mind bows down in joyful adoration.

169. These changes to our narrow and prejudiced judgment, often seem contradictory and awful; and we shudder at the recollection of what man has done, as we shudder at what he is doing. But it is only thus awful because it is the work of

one who is unknown to us, except by his works. Thus it is that in parts of the Old Testament, the thoughts of the prophet, or seer, or psalmist, break out into what is almost a cry of terror, as some glimpses of the unknown majesty flash across his mind, lifted up in a sort of ecstasy. This it is that is meant by the words 'Thou canst not see my face and live.' Yet this is totally unlike that dread of God, as an avenging deity, which constitutes the basis of the dogmas of the Evangelical and of the whole Romish doctrine concerning God. It is not a horror of God, as of one condemning helpless men to eternal torments. It is an overwhelming sense of the incomprehensible nature of God *in Himself*, as one in all of whose acts is mingled an element of the mighty and the mysterious.

170. Before God thus uncomprehended we cannot but humble ourselves in awe, as well as in joy; we tremble as we love; but yet we love Him with that unconquered love which tends to become 'perfect,' and to 'cast out fear.' And it is in the presence of this God, and in adoration of His works, that the pre-Christian seers and poets, such as the writers of the Book of Job and of many of

the Psalms, are filled with that indescribable sense of exultation of which the mind is capable when it thinks of the very awfulness and incomprehensibleness of that Being, whose life we discern *in* this uncomprehended evolution.

171. To those who are entirely unconscious of such a sense of joy and exultation, I cannot explain it. Natural and simple, as it seems to myself, I cannot make it so to those to whom it is personally unknown. To those who cannot understand me, and yet are musically endowed in a high degree, I can perhaps partly render it intelligible and rational, by comparing it to the sense with which they listen to a perfect performance of a vast symphony or choral work, where a multitude of players and singers are sounding their instruments and uplifting their voices, in a concourse of mingled concords and discords, and modulations strange, and perhaps in themselves ugly, while each instrument is sometimes even poor and faulty when it sounds alone; and yet the whole transports the sympathetic listener to rapture; and a sense of repose and peace, and strange contentment fills us as we hear those rushing torrents, and those ever interweaving links of 'lingering sweetness, long drawn out.' Such is

the occasional ecstasy of the humble mind that associates itself, as far as it may be, with the undying love of Him, 'in whom we live, and move, and have our being.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Twofold character of the four Gospels.—Peculiar character of the fourth Gospel.—Can the report of a miracle be true?—There can be no doubt as to what religion Jesus did teach.—Difficulty of realising what the actual Jesus was in His life among His brother working men.—Slow advance of the religion of the Lord's Prayer in Christian nations.—Inspiration; its varieties.—The inspiration, life, and death of Jesus.—Effects of the teaching of Paul.—Fundamental difference between the teaching of Jesus and of Paul.—Rise of the later Roman system, and its present condition.—The future after death.—Annihilation.—Eternity of punishment.—Eternal personal unconsciousness inconsistent with the method on which the world has been carried on.—Practical certainty of a future life.

172. Such being the beliefs and habits of the more civilised races at the time when Jesus of Nazareth taught a further development of the elementary laws of a man's nature; what, we immediately ask, do we know of *Him*? The New Testament tells its own story, while the story told by Rome is one that cannot possibly be entertained, for it is nothing less than a *reductio ad impossibile.* But what are these four narratives, termed gospels, with the names of certain men attached to them, which profess to give an outline of the life of Jesus, together with the account of

His death, and what happened immediately afterwards?

173. They relate a twofold story; one of these being an account of events which are not in any way beyond the pale of human life, such as it is known to us all by our personal experience; the other being the record of a variety of events, usually spoken of as impossibilities when they are related to us as having actually occurred; or termed fables, parables, or fictions, when written with any sort of merely literary object. It would be a gratuitous misrepresentation to speak of these last as falsehoods, or to use regarding them any term of reproach, because there is no sign of their being intentional deceptions, or in any way the work of dishonest men. Not one of the four gospels makes any pretence of being free from error in what it records, or to have any advantages beyond the other three; while one of them, which is attributed to a writer of the name of John, is evidently a species of devout biography founded on facts, inasmuch as the writer gives in detail the secret meditations of Jesus, and His prayers to God; all of which it is absurd to suppose that Jesus Himself afterwards reported to the narrator, while the narrator himself makes no pretence to

any such source of information, nor does he pretend to have received any of that supernatural inspiration which by degrees came to be attributed to him.

174. As I am writing only for those whose desire it is to *know*, as far as possible, what is the truth concerning Jesus, I do not enter into any disquisitions concerning what are called the miraculous portions of these narratives. To a person who wishes to know what is true, as a matter of fact, discussions as to the authenticity of each portion of the Gospels, and the evidences of their genuineness which are supposed to be furnished by early writers, are without interest, except in a secondary degree. Eternity and religion are not matters to be played with. If it were a question as to the date of a coin, or the costume or dialect of a particular period, we might consider the subject quite enough proved by a little contemporary gossip, or by some inexact references to some statements known only by tradition.

175. But we are now concerned with God and Eternity, and the small amount of evidence and tradition which might be all we cared for, on an antiquarian or literary topic, is an insult to our

understanding, when it is God, and our relations to Him, and the title that Jesus has to be regarded as a voice from Him, on which we are engaged. These shadowy stories about the carpenter's son, these marvels which belie the whole course of human experience, these reports of a birth, a life, a rising from the grave, and a going up into the clouds before a crowd of persons, what are they all? Can I possibly know that they are true?

176. Where can I find any evidence which is to be listened to when I am sitting in my solitude and thinking what it is to die, and when nothing, except what I can *know*, is worth more than a puff of wind? What avails it that millions and millions say that these things happened? Of what consequence is it that for 1800 years many persons have asserted that the way to get at the truth concerning a departed teacher, is to treat with contempt all the laws by which we get at truth in general, and that the way to know the truth, is to pay no heed to all the laws of truth by which our reason is necessarily guided?

177. It is a waste of time to regard any miraculous reports, as even possibly true. Those who first propagated them, and others who afterwards

wrote them down, did it all in good faith; as newspaper writers, and travellers, and historians often write to-day. But the good faith of the writers is not the question before us. The narratives they relate are impossible, and cannot even be discussed, except by stupifying the operations of that reason by which alone we know anything. What we really need, is to discover whether it is certain that a mechanic, of far off royal blood, lived and died in Judæa, above eighteen centuries ago, who taught additions to, or rather profound alterations in, the existing theology and morals of his countrymen, the substance of which teaching is to be gathered with certainty from these Gospels, and which is embodied in a few words in the Lord's Prayer.

178. Can any reasonable critic entertain the slightest doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was this man? I am not arguing the question, whether many other things are or are not probable concerning Him, for we are not discussing literary or religious possibilities. We are questioning the dead past, and asking of it what is undeniably true, and I repeat—Can any, the severest critic, who is serious in the matter, doubt that this man Jesus did teach this religion? Add to this certainty

whatever else we may please, thus far there can be no doubt; He taught that the essence of true religion is personal humility and the love of God and of our fellow men.

179. In order to know this it is not essential that we should go through any detailed examination of the various modern critiques on the Gospels, which have established the real nature of their authorship. It is not necessary that we should attribute to them any species of inspiration, or suppose that they are not free from mistakes. Granting all that can be granted short of an admission that they are literally fictions, which (like the theory of Strauss) is too absurd for refutation, we *know* from these biographies that Jesus of Nazareth taught the religion of humility and love; and that out of His teaching grew that association of men which ultimately became the Church that was established by Constantine the Great.

180. What is really difficult to us, is to realise the simple facts of His life and His personal character, appearance, and habits; those beginnings out of which in the end was formed the Church of Constantine, and which have been 'glorified,' as people think, into the facts of the

life, death, and ascension of Jesus by the Roman priesthood; while the fine arts at their disposal have so corrupted the popular imagination that it has become difficult to picture to our mind's eye the real Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary. Who, for instance, with all his experience of children, and the most intense activity of the imagination, can picture to himself the Saintly boy, as he must have lived among His playfellows, forming, by the inner discipline of His nature, those habits which ultimately became the secret of the life with which at last He went about among fishermen, and other working people? Can we paint Him at the marriage feast, a working man among working men, talking, smiling, perhaps jesting, playing with the children, and only differing from other men about 30 years old by the sweetness of His countenance, and the simplicity and self-forgetfulness of His manners? Think what the real Jesus was, when with children, and compare the picture, with the conceptions which painters, and books, and essays have given to us of the same.

181. The whole life of Jesus ought, indeed, to be taken into our account, when we try to discern the reality of the method, by which He transformed the old religion of the Psalms into the religion

of personal humility. In many and many a passage in the Old Testament it is obvious that the Jewish people were being prepared for an evolution of morals and theology, of far wider scope and far greater depth than any change which had gone before. And though we cannot positively assert that it was precisely on this or that occasion or in these identical words that Jesus opened the eyes of His followers to the new doctrines, not as new but as involved in the old ones, it is really as clear as noon-day that this species of teaching must have pervaded the conversation and the more formal discourses of this new expounder of the Sacred Books and the traditions of the people.

182. For this is always remarkable in the conversations and instructions of Jesus, that while He condemned the contemporary interpretations of the old scriptures, He invariably pointed out or implied, that His own teaching was not in contradiction to the old. This system came into being by the law of evolution, from that of Moses, and the Prophets. Moses, 'because of the hardness of their hearts,' taught them one thing, He, being instructed by our Father in Heaven, taught them another. As the ages rolled along, and human passion and reason struggled which should be the

strongest and the fittest to be the rule of life, for the development of all men's powers, the new commandment to love one another was to be brought forward and to take its place as the sovereign guide in all the affairs of men.

183. Age after age was to pass away before love was actually to rule all things supreme. I came 'to send a sword,' Jesus is related to have said, on one occasion. The sword of persecution, the sword of Rome, the sword of the Inquisition, the sword which now is lord in nearly all human affairs, the sword which in the late Vatican Council emphatically anathematised all that is noble, free, and pure in national society. But still the silent ceaseless work was to go on, the blood of the martyrs was to flow, while the world waited for the 'survival of the fittest.'

184. And now, for many years past, we have seen come forth into life some faint indications of a fresh evolution of the doctrine of the Lord's Prayer; we have begun to regard human life as a sacred thing in itself, slavery is everywhere yielding, and though 'Christians' go to war on more gigantic scales than ever, the bloodthirstiness and cruelty of wars is far less than of old. We are

now also familiar with one other development of the old scripture saying that 'the righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.' Pity for the brute creation is now recognised among Christian duties in places where it was formerly scoffed at: it is the doctrine of Roman theologians that cruelty to beasts is not a sin. Let us who are Englishmen be thankful that with all our faults and hypocrisies we were the first people in the world to protect by law the helpless brutes against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are said sometimes to be 'made in the image of God.'

185. That phrase, indeed, which is so odious to many persons, when stripped of its extravagances, and political and social associations—the doctrine of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity'—is in reality the doctrine of the Lord's Prayer, and teaches that God is the Father of all men without distinction of rank, race, or nationality, such distinctions being nothing more than convenient social arrangements, valuable as such, and as such only.

186. That evolution, too, for the preaching of which Jesus died on the cross, is still moving onwards, by very slow degrees indeed. It has but a feeble hold on any nominally Christian organisa-

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is, when we get free from the traditional theories of past times and the narrow judgments of the present, nothing more dreadful to think of, in what is termed moral evils, than in bodily evils. Of all alike we know only that they are imperfections, apparent failures, struggles, and, in truth, utterly incomprehensible. There is nothing left for us to do but to endeavour to 'possess our souls in peace,' and to submit to the will of this awful and gracious God.

188. What, at the same time, do we really mean when we speak of Christ's being led, by some species of 'inspiration,' to introduce so vast an advance as that which He effected in the religion of His fellow-countrymen? How came the carpenter's son to comprehend this new method of looking at human affairs, which was at once partially to alter the belief of the whole civilised world in regard to the highest perfection attainable by man? Admitting all that had been divined by others before Him, how came He simply to put aside the whole conception of God, not only as being one instead of many, but as standing in the natural relation of a Father to all mankind alike?

189. This difficulty cannot be solved except by solving another difficulty, which it will probably

never be given to man completely to understand. What is it that takes place in the mind which we express by the word inspiration in its various meanings? This is a question which can only be solved by understanding the mode in which the Divine essence acts upon all natures alike. Thoughts of boundless variety are borne in upon the mind, of whose entrance we cannot give any explanation that is not a mere shifting of the difficulty. Its simplest and least valuable form goes by the name of fancy; then come the varieties of the gift of the imagination; and lastly, what is termed inspiration, in the strictest sense of the word. With the generic difference between the fancy and the imagination we have nothing now to do. Our question is, In what does the inspiration, which I attribute to Jesus, consist? and in what does it differ from that inspiration which theological writers, called orthodox, attribute to him?

190. I reply that it differs not at all. I cannot tell what puts various thoughts into the minds of thinking men, although I can tell by what process they can repudiate them. How came the thoughts and words of Shelley's 'Ode to the Skylark' to enter his brain? I cannot conceive. I mean that all I can understand is, that as he directed his

mind towards the subject, the prosaic facts which he had learnt beforehand arranged themselves before his excited reason, in those marvellous stanzas, and the dull words and memories of past life flew, as if alive, into that magic music. How, too, did it enter into the mind of Jesus of Nazareth to represent the true God, and our relation to Him, and our duties to one another, as He did represent them, and as no one had before represented them? We cannot tell.

191. The facts of man's heart and life He knew already, by processes of thought which brought together the relations of men to one another, and the relations of God to man, in what we now see to have been the obvious truths, as none before had known them, and the deductions which necessarily follow from such knowledge came by slow degrees or by mighty leaps into his mind. How came they there? There is but one answer: they were the effect of that operation of the Infinite upon the finite of the nature of which we know nought. What he did see was by virtue of a knowledge of every fact which then could be known, and by a keenness of reasoning transcending all other men's reason. The Eternal God, living his own Eternal life, taught these truths and

their proofs to the humble man, as he wandered to and fro, and lived his life among his friends, before He came before them, before He presented Himself, as sent by God to teach them and to die for it. It is all plain enough to us now who see things with a light that He then lighted. But what was it in the days of old?

192. Thus it is, to take an illustration from that class of thoughts which seem most like inspiration to many persons, I mean the musical art. Every true musician will understand that I am giving his own experience of the inexplicable mystery. How do all these melodies and harmonies come into his mind? He does not know, when he begins, what he is going to play. A moment before and he is in the dark. As the fingers touch the keys, and he thinks and feels perhaps he scarcely knows what, a world of tunes and modulations and swiftly or slowly moving sounds, telling what is in his thoughts, flows on and on, he cannot tell how, or why. What is it all? Whether it be good or bad, it comes and it moves onward, from change to change, till he winds it up, and then it dies away. What is it, when a man thus plays that which fills his mind? There is only one explanation as to how it comes there. It comes

from the source of all Life; it is the effect of that never-dying and universal Life of the Eternal which He lives through the instrumentality of us 'who live in Him.'

193. All this is doubtless needless, if not false, in the eyes of those who think that what is written in the Gospels is to be received as true, because the writers were miraculously inspired by God to say only what was literally true. This, however, is not a subject which we are discussing, being a mere hypothesis. I am not able to reason seriously with those who can gravely put forward such a supposition on any evidence which is actually attainable, and which would bear cross-examination like a witness in a matter of life and death in an English court of justice.

194. There is, however, one aspect of the inspiration theory which is of great interest, but which I do not remember to have seen treated of by any writer, English or foreign. It is this: How could any person, say St. Paul, know that he was inspired, supposing that he *felt* intensely that he was so. It really is obvious that any such knowledge would be impossible. It is perpetually alleged that God could, of course, communicate any such knowledge

to any man; but is this the question? Surely not. The question is now, could any person himself ascertain that the ideas in his mind were not illusions? What test could any man possess by which he could distinguish between a fancy that arose out of his own head, and a supernatural information? After all he must go back, time after time, to his own reason, which on such subjects is for ever fallible.

195. And this is exactly what is to be advanced respecting the inspiration of a poet, of a musician, and of a prophet like Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, in introducing His new religion, as the teaching of the Eternal God, must have tested the inspired truths which had taken possession of his mind by the usual tests which are in the power of intellects of the highest order, and of affections of the most exquisite intensity. All that the Old Testament Scriptures could tell him of the history of man, and of the religion of the past, he knew. Everything that could be known of the workings of human emotion, in family life, in the society and practices of the professional religious teachers of his day, of the religion of the Romans, and others who were not Hebrews, and of the morality involved in the connection between Jew and Gentile,—with all this he was familiar.

196. He knew what was the Jehovah worshipped by the pious Jew, and also, what was the God of the pious soul that was not of Jewish race. He could contrast the hypocrisy of the monotheist Pharisee with the comparative justice of the polytheist Pilate, who gave Him to die, out of sheer cowardice—,all was known to that devout, patient, and penetrating reason; and He taught all around Him that whatever was allowable in the old time, the day was now come for the promulgation of the rule, 'after this manner pray ye,' and He taught it professedly—as at once the old creed—and at the same time its irreconcilable enemy. And He did this, foreseeing the bloody, agonising death to which that teaching would bring Him, at the hands of the priesthood, who professed to serve the living God; for 'so persecuted they the prophets which were before Him.'

197. Such was the inspiration, the religion, and the fate of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus far, was the nature of man prepared for the evolution of a more perfect good. As the hidden mystery of the Eternal, lived Its Life; while Eternity moved onwards into futurity. Small indeed, comparatively speaking, was the immediate effect of this evolution; but it was profound; and the seed thus planted

began to grow and has never died. Wonderful, on the other hand, was the alteration which speedily took place in that religion through the unintentional corruption of its first principles, at the hands of one of its most brilliant preachers. A great man arose, not the son of a carpenter, but a professed and highly educated philosopher, whose philosophy was not, like that of Jesus, the philosophy of experiment of evolution, and of actual fact; but was an ingenious adaptation of a debased Platonism to the passions and capacities of the Semitic, Greek, and Roman races of the day.

198. And it is the more important that we should take full account of this alteration in the religion of Jesus, through the philosophical theology of Paul, because the influence of pure Christianity, whose type is Jesus upon the Cross, has been so slight upon the personal, social, and national life of men. How can it be accounted for that the religion of humility, love, and of detachment from the vulgar love of riches, should still exercise so feeble an influence upon us all? The religion of nearly all the Christian churches is not the religion of Jesus; it is the religion of Paul, and the god whom Paul worshipped was not the God whom Jesus worshipped, and Who spoke through the lips of Jesus. And it

was through the false philosophy which he had learnt before he was a Christian, that Paul invented out of the traditions of Genesis, those awful dogmas which he put forth concerning the religion of Christ, and which exactly satisfied the spiritual pride and the pagan sacerdotalism of the age which followed the death of Christ.

199. The contrast between the method of teaching, which was habitual with Jesus, and the rhetorical arguing in which Paul delighted, is manifest on the very surface. With Jesus we hear of sinners, with Paul we hear of sin; with Jesus. it is the parable or the conversation which treats of the daily affairs of men, and of the right way by which their lives were to be brought into harmony with perfect humility, and charity, and sweet meditativeness. With Paul we have such amazing reasoning as this, that Adam brought 'sin' into the world, and that 'sin' is a thing of infinite guilt, and that therefore it deserved an 'infinite' punishment; which theorising was very soon distorted into the definite assertion, that the poor Jews and Romans themselves had committed sins against God, so dreadful, that they all, the fishermen, or shoemakers, or the poor mechanics, actually deserved, by the laws of justice, to be tortured for ever in hell.

200. In all Greek and Roman mythology is there anything so dreadful and so blasphemous against the religion of Jesus? I am using strong words, but they are only strong because they are plain and simple; and I repeat that in all the old stories about Jupiter and Juno, and Mars, and Minerva, and Apollo, and the rest of them, there is nothing so frightful as the notion that the Eternal God has damned to hell fire the little children in the street before me, because Adam was seduced by a silly woman to eat a fruit which a serpent told her was delicious, and which would make her wiser than God wished her to be.

201. Out of this doctrine of a real hell brought into man's history by the operation of an abstraction called sin, and declared to be infinite, it was natural that all sorts of debasing superstitions should arise. The God of love being dethroned, and the Pauline god put up in its place, the way was opened for the clever practices of priests, Jew and Gentile. Paul himself was no lover of priests. His one idea was to the effect that everybody should obey *him.* He would have nothing to do with the quiet working men and their friends at Jerusalem, who very naturally considered that they knew much more about Christ and His preaching

than this new convert did, wonderful man as he might be, and unanswerable as they found his views about the old Jewish rites and regulations. They had nothing to do but continue that version of their Master's religion which seemed to make a good deal of the 'Church and its ministers;' while this formidable Paul, who had doubtless shown what a mighty preacher he might be, lived a life apart from them for about two years, meditating on the Christianity which he would present to the world when the time of his seclusion should be over.

202. And thus it was that the creed and practices called after the name of Christ became what they are now. That religion which was based upon the principle that the divine charity was unfolding itself in the evolution of a practical religion of love, was arrested in the mingled Platonist, Manichean, and Millenarian dreams of Paul. Can anything be imagined more opposed to the guidance with which Jesus would lead all men equal and abounding in love, to the one Father of all, than that strange fable about His appearing and reigning over the saints a thousand years, after which was to follow the gigantic fight which captivated the imagination of Paul?

203. Of course I am not imputing to the Millenarian preachers or writers any conscious inventions. They had merely got hold of some of the unwritten sayings of Christ and coloured them, and filled them up with their heated fancies, till people came to delight in such compositions as the Apocalypse. While all this was going on among one class of converts, others took up those views of the unappeasable wrath of an angry deity, in which hardly anyone knew the meanings of the words they employed, while all the while the belief in a priesthood crept more and more into the public Christian mind, and the Lord's Supper was turned into a morning sacrifice for the appeasing of the fury of God by the instrumentality of a consecrated body of ministers.

204. In Paul's later letters, we see before he dies his rejection of the Millenarian fable, and the gradual softening of an impetuous temper, and the longing to be set free, that he might be with Christ, which was far better. But the mischief was done. He himself was soon to be set free; but the bloody doctrine of the priesthood was already rooted far and wide. Ceremonialism, and the narrowness of spiritual pride, and the dread of the Father, were already banishing the one pure gospel.

Rome was already daringly feeling her way to universal dominion; Cyprian was laying the foundations of the creed of the Vatican Council; Eastern and Western 'liturgies' were beginning to venerate the pieces of bread, for which Aquinas was to write the hymns of adoration many centuries later; the sword of orthodoxy was sharpening under Constantine for cutting the throats of Arians, and the true followers of Jesus were beginning to hide themselves, to pray 'to their Father in secret.'

205. It is therefore no objection to the doctrine of the great evolution of the Divine will in Jesus of Nazareth that 1,800 years have passed, and we are still what we are. Considering how vast was the period between the beginning of trustworthy history and the birth of Jesus, it may be thought not surprising that within less than 2,000 years we should have made so little advance as we have made. Rome indeed is, on the whole, less anti-Christian than of old. It is a childish thing to regard the Pope as infallible; but was it not equally absurd, and certainly more inconvenient, to take the sayings of a council of bishops as infallible? The one is not more foolish than the other; and it must fairly be said that the Jesuits and others who are the most devoted adherents of the doctrine of

papal infallibility, are not by any means the least liberal in their interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, and in literary and scientific criticism.

206. Of the widespread system of deception by which Rome still carries out her ends, by terrifying the superstitious and cowardly, and gratifying the aims of the ambitious, it is difficult to say too much; but I have known a large number of her members, and of some of her chief guides I have the worst possible opinion. I also see that the Protestant world is almost entirely in the dark as to her real nature and qualities. They think at the same time too well of her and too ill of her.

207. Still, she is not worse than she was four or five hundred years ago. There is nothing now that surpasses, or perhaps equals, the grossness of her superstitions, the audacity of her lying, or the tyranny of her priesthood, as these things existed in the middle ages. The evils of her casuistry are more systematic than they were before the Reformation; but they are not worse in substance, while in many respects the casuistry of Protestants is very far from being faultless. In truth, casuistry as the science of morals, together with theological philosophy, have scarcely any existence among

Protestants. All that we have done of late years has been to issue a variety of lumbering, half-hearted criticisms of the Bible; at least this has been the case in England. In Rome, on the other hand, while her scientific theology has materially fallen off, almost into decay, as a practical working organisation, her clergy are less cruelly false and idolatrous; she has learnt a good deal from German Protestantism, and from that liberal theological philosophy which can scarcely be called Protestant, because it regards both Roman and Protestant orthodoxy with almost equal indifference.

208. What will be the working of the new Roman doctrine of papal infallibility upon the development of the religion of Jesus and the Lord's Prayer, in conjunction with the growth of the new social and political forces which are about to play their mighty part in the world's history, it is impossible to divine. No one can foresee whether or not some powerful love of truth as such may not find its way into the Roman laity and priesthood; no one can say whether some school of (so-called) mystics may not arise among them, prepared by a combined study of the philosophy of Aquinas and recent biblical criticism, for silently giving a new life to much of the Roman idolatry and super-

stition. Of all these possibilities in the future we know not anything. What shall be the next evolution in our knowledge of the unseen God, and in our ideas of right and wrong, under the action of the secret thoughts which for many a year have been seething beneath the cassocks, the chasubles, and the mitres of Rome? Let us wait in patience for that future which we shall never see, and pass away when the time for each one of us is come, confident that God is what He has always been, and that the future for each individual soul, which the teaching of Jesus contemplates, is not a cruel mockery.

209. If, on the other hand, there is no God with whom we have anything practical to do, if all this advancement in the nature of individual men and women is to end in nothing but their eternal unconsciousness, so that one might as well have been a grain of corn, or a fragment of crystal, what is the universe, with all its mysteries, and all its pangs, but a frightful farce? It is true that it is not an impossibility, that the advancement and evolution of our race, which is in itself an undeniable fact, does not *necessarily* imply the continuance of a conscious existence of any one person, who will find himself, when he dies, in a state of exist-

ence better than the present, where labour so often leads only to failure, and a capacity for loving means only a capacity for sorrow.

210. This, I say, is within the limits of possibility, and it is also possible that each one of us may end in nothing but an eternal personal unconsciousness. Annihilation, like a creation out of nothing, is an impossibility; but the question is, is it credible that such an ending for each individual of us all is consistent with that organisation of the world, of which our ignorance, our sufferings, our knowledge, and our love are so large a portion? Does not each man move onwards through life, on the principle that continued individual existence is its first foundation? All of us act, and strive, and love, from year to year, on the hypothesis that we are personally lasting beings. What is our love to-day but a continuance and a development of our love of yesterday, and our yesterday's love a continuance of our love of the day before? Man does not act as he does, his motives are not motives at all, except on the conviction that our life is a personal life hereafter.

211. And if it is such a continued life here, what conceivable ground have we for imagining that, at

death, the Unseen Source of all life overthrows the whole system, on which He has made use of our life up to the moment of death in this world? If all is nothing, and we love God and one another for nought, what is God Himself?

212. On the supposition that at death, or at any time after death, we cease to have any consciousness of our individuality, it is not only that we cease to exist, it is a new law which would thus be introduced into the universe. God, through whom all nature has undergone evolution from all eternity, suddenly ceases to employ our nature according to His former law, for that law has been the law of hope, and a consciousness of continuance. We hope ever, and hope on. What would be the activity in improvement in men who are convinced that death *must* mean eternal sleep? I do not say those who fear it, but those who are absolutely convinced that so it must be.

213. There is another theory in which many persons now take refuge, when the thought of eternal damnation is more than they can bear. They fancy that they will simply cease to be; that is, they will be annihilated. There is simply, however, another impossibility, that which *is* must

always exist. *Ex nihilo, nihil fit.* This is a truth from which there is no escape. A man who doubts it, simply does not understand the nature of existence, and of non-existence. And that which is true of the passing from nothingness into somethingness, is equally true of the passing from somethingness into nothingness. We *cannot* become nothing; we may become eternally unconscious, but we cannot cease to be. We know nothing as to what we were ourselves before we were born into this life, but we existed nevertheless.

214. How we existed is another question; we know nothing of it because we know nothing as to how God existed, in Whom we always lived, and moved, and had our being. As things now are, we pass out of this life after a conscious existence, in which that consciousness and perpetuation have been the very instrument by which the Eternal One has lived His own life. Is it credible that the Eternal God, having lived His life through us, and in us, should in every case visit upon us the destruction of our own conscious personal life? Is the Universe throughout a cruel mockery?

215. Concerning the myriads in whom thought,

love, and mental suffering have never existed, it may be another question ; but even in their strange lot, why does the infant, who is to have no conscious heaven, hereafter, breathe even one solitary cry? Is not this cry rather the first token of the existence which is to grow in continuance and evolution in some life of which we know nothing? And on the supposition that this first voice of pain means nothing, and leads to nothing, what is it but a blot upon the Universe?

216. Such a supposition, let us remember, is not a confession of our ignorance : it is a pretence to knowledge. If we assume that the cry of the infant, which dies immediately after birth, may lead to nothing, we positively assert that God may do that which has no place in His own life—in the organisation of the Universe which is the result of this Eternal life. This is not a confession that the ways of God are not to be comprehended by us ; it is an assertion that they are comprehended, and that we know that an innumerable multitude of His acts lead to nothing. To confess that we are ignorant of the mode in which the consciousness of continued personality after death fits into the Divine method, by which man is made an element in the life of God, is one thing. To say that we

know that it is possible that it may not fit into it at all, is an assumption that we know the ways of the Eternal, and that they are naught. It is, therefore, impossible to believe that an eternal unconsciousness can be the ultimate destiny of man.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GENERAL ARGUMENT.

217. What, then, is the substance of this book, stated in a few concluding words? It is an attempt to show, as briefly as possible, that the mystery of the present life, with its past and its future history, is the result of its being caused by the Eternal Life of God, as distinguished from His mere existence, without change or activity, as a merely existing Being. It is an exposition of the doctrine taught by Thomas Aquinas, the greatest philosopher and theological thinker of the Middle Ages, that God is immanent in all things material and spiritual; supplemented by the doctrine of Darwin, who has discovered, with an irresistible amplitude of proof, the fact that God has followed one special method, by which He has lived His own eternal life in all created things. In Jesus of Nazareth I recognise the completion of this method of evolution, in the survival of the fittest, in the moral order.

218. In pursuing this inquiry I have called attention to the necessary limits which encircle all human knowledge concerning God, and I have pointed out the impossibility of very many of those conceptions which Christians often imagine to be a knowledge of God, but which are in reality a mere trifling with empty phrases, and a repetition of high-sounding words. I have also called attention to the limits which make certain things impossible to God Himself; explaining at the same time the absolute certainty of many truths which we thus learn respecting our own life, here and hereafter, as the result of its essential union with the life of God.

219. Further, I have thus been led to point out the necessary truth of St. Paul's doctrine of Predestination, with the fictitious and anti-Christian nature of that dogma of Election, by which he was led astray, and in which, while conceiving himself to be the destroyer of the old Jewish narrowness, he laid the foundations of a more dreadful exclusiveness, which upheld the pretensions of the sacerdotal caste, and culminated in the despotism of Rome herself.

220. In many parts of the Jewish Psalms and Prophecies, and in the doctrine of the λόγος as

taught in the fourth Gospel, I see the elements of this same doctrine of the life of God in its relation to the soul of man, uttered with all the passionate love and joy of the poetic Jewish people, and in substance identical with the calmer scientific teaching of the more philosophic races of Teutonic Europe and India.

221. Finally, as to the bearing of these doctrines upon the practical question of the Established Church of England, they furnish a strictly philosophical, as well as a purely spiritual ground for its maintenance. Apart from such a philosophy, it can hardly be doubted that if any serious spiritual revival should arouse the English people, it would take the form of an angry fanaticism, and the Church, instead of being reformed, would be swept utterly away; a catastrophe, in my judgment, to be earnestly deprecated by every enlightened Christian, and every well-wisher of his country.

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